

“I’VE A VOICE, I’VE A VOICE”:
DETERMINING STEPHEN SONDHEIM’S COMPOSITIONAL STYLE THROUGH A
MUSIC-THEORETIC ANALYSIS OF HIS THEATER WORKS

BY

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Abstract

This dissertation offers a music-theoretic analysis of the musical style of Stephen Sondheim, as surveyed through his fourteen musicals that have appeared on Broadway. The analysis begins with dramatic concerns, where musico-dramatic intensity analysis graphs show the relationship between music and drama, and how one may affect the interpretation of events in the other. These graphs also show hierarchical recursion in both music and drama. The focus of the analysis then switches to how Sondheim uses traditional accompaniment schemata, but also stretches the schemata into patterns that are distinctly of his voice; particularly in the use of the waltz in four, developing accompaniment, and emerging meter. Sondheim shows his harmonic voice in how he juxtaposes treble and bass lines, creating diagonal dissonances. He also uses dramatically striking chords called effect harmonies in most of his musicals. He obtains middleground harmonic cohesion through the use of chromaticism and pedal points. Background cohesion comes by remaining in a single key, despite the monotonal excursions he takes that bring the characters and the music to places perceived as far away from where they started. The final approach of the analysis examines Sondheim's melodies, which are shown to share a number of properties with classical and popular Western melodic writing. However, he also defies melodic trends of step inertia and step declination. His use of motivic stops and melodic cadences often contains large intervals or outlines of large intervals not common in other composers. Prosody and drama affect his melodic writing, in that he writes short, motivic units that are often repeated for a dramatic effect, sometimes disrupting meter and hypermeter. He also writes melodies that are shared between actors in scored dialogue. These musical elements all play a part in the identification of Sondheim's style.

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Introduction: Sondheim's Influence on the Musical Theater

The musical, you must remember, is America's most distinctive contribution to the theater, and though it's the most popular form of theater in this country, it is a form that has been lacking in content and in artistry. Its potential is largely unexplored. There is no reason that the musical must be trivial to be entertaining and successful. So much of the theater is expectation and it's far worse to get dull disappointment than gallant failure.

—Arthur Laurents¹

Arthur Laurents, who among other successes in the theater wrote the libretti for the popular musicals *West Side Story* (1957) and *Gypsy* (1959), brought forth this desire for American musical theater to become not just a popular commercial endeavor, but a true art form with substantive content. In line with the sweeping social changes in mid-twentieth-century America, musical theater creators—in the generations since Rodgers and Hammerstein in particular—have shared Laurents's sentiments on the potential for musicals to challenge audiences. Of the composers from this and subsequent generations, Stephen Sondheim (b. 1930) is the name that stands out from the rest when discussing the genre in terms of artistic quality and realization of the potential of the art form. His contributions both musically and dramatically to American musical theater have taken the art form to a new level, inspiring generations of composers after him to create musicals that do more than just entertain.² Not only does Sondheim distinguish himself in the post-Rodgers-and-Hammerstein generation, he is also likely to overshadow many composers of musicals that came before him when his impact on the art form is considered.

¹ Craig Zadan, *Sondheim & Co*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 62-63.

² Sondheim is acknowledged as a master among scholars and critics alike, even though he has a relatively small Broadway following and many of his Broadway works have been commercial failures in a commerce-dominated economy.

Before Sondheim, early twentieth-century American musical theater was dominated by three sub-genres: musical comedy, operetta, and vaudeville.³ The quality and merit of composers and songwriters like Franz Lehár, Jerome Kern, Cole Porter, and Irving Berlin left Broadway with a number of well-loved and well-crafted songs. With the exception of operettas, whose popularity waned on Broadway by the 1930s, most musical theater pieces were not carefully “integrated”—meaning that the songs were not specifically tied to the books of the shows—until the time of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!* (1943). In musical comedies, a Porter love song might be replaced in one show by another Porter love song without worrying about how it affects plot or character.⁴ This move toward integration in musical comedies was a gradual process that can be traced back to Kern’s Princess Theater shows in the 1910s.⁵ Despite that *Oklahoma!* receives much of the credit for integrating the musical, there were some integrated shows outside of operetta before Rodgers and Hammerstein’s collaboration, including Kern’s *Showboat* (1927), George Gershwin’s *Of Thee I Sing* (1931) and Rodgers and Lorenz Hart’s *Pal Joey* (1940).

While Rodgers and Hammerstein set a new standard for integrated musicals, by carefully choosing where the songs would occur within the drama even before writing

³ William Everett, “American and British Operetta in the 1920s: Romance, Nostalgia and Adventure,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical, 2nd Edition*, ed. William Everett and Paul Laird (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 72-88.

⁴ A famous example is Porter’s *Anything Goes* (1934), which has had several different books applied to the same set of songs.

⁵ See Orly Leah Krasner, “Birth Pangs, Growing Pains and Sibling Rivalry: Musical Theatre in New York, 1900-1920,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical, 2nd Edition*, ed. William Everett and Paul Laird (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 54-71, especially 69-70.

any music and lyrics, much of the content and form of many other musical theater writers remained the same. Love stories were most common, and most of them featured conflicts that were neatly resolved. In these shows, neither the intelligence nor the social mores of the audiences were often challenged the way they were with straight plays.⁶ The music was not often challenging for the audiences either. Most adhered to thirty-two-bar song forms with reprises that reminded the listener of the tune, from which came many hit songs by many great songwriters.⁷

Milton Babbitt, who knew the popular music repertoire extensively and even wrote musical theater songs himself, has been quoted as saying “very few Broadway composers were all that educated. Richard Rodgers, who was considered the smartest of the gang, had no real connection with the world of serious music.”⁸ Irving Berlin, arguably the most popular songwriter of the twentieth century, had no formal musical training. He would devise melodies, for which he then had his assistant play various

⁶ A straight play refers to a dramatic work in which the actors do not sing, unless they do so diegetically. There are notable exceptions of musicals that deal with pointed social issues: Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *South Pacific* (1949)—which won the Pulitzer Prize for drama—with racism; Frank Loesser’s *The Most Happy Fella* (1956) with unplanned pregnancy; and Leonard Bernstein’s (with Sondheim) *West Side Story* (1957) with gang violence and a tragic ending are a few of the most prominent. In most cases, these kinds of musicals were slow to surface until around the 1950s.

⁷ Again, there are important exceptions, especially among Rodgers and Hammerstein’s works, to the standard thirty-bar song form. A prime example is “Soliloquy” from *Carousel*.

⁸ Zadan, *Sondheim & Co*, 6-7. For a discussion on Babbitt’s songwriting, See Allen Forte, “Milton Babbitt’s “Three Theatrical Songs” In Perspective,” *Perspectives of New Music* 35, no. 2 (1997). The three songs Forte discusses are “As Long As It Isn’t Love,” “Penelope’s Night Song” and “Now You See it, Now You Don’t.”

harmonizations until he picked the one he liked the best.⁹ Again, this is not to say these songwriters did not write lasting and endearing tunes, but they stayed within the realm of popular music, as opposed to that of the so-called “serious,” academically trained composers.

Stephen Sondheim has proven to be a different kind of musical theater composer, as one whose sophisticated musical language is on par with what is studied in the academy. Babbitt, with whom Sondheim studied privately after his undergraduate years, said:

He made it clear immediately that he wasn't interested in becoming what one would call a serious composer, but he wanted to know a great deal more about so-called serious music because he thought it would be suggestive and useful...No one could have been more serious about his music than Steve and he wanted to improve himself in every conceivable way. He wanted his music to be as sophisticated and as knowing within the obvious restraints of a Broadway musical.¹⁰

Sondheim wanted to take the training and education of a composer of serious music, and apply that level of dedication and sophistication to the Broadway musical. His friend Burt Shevelove elaborates:

You could tell from the very beginning that he was not just a songwriter...He never said ‘I have a melody here’ or ‘wouldn't this be a cute idea for a song?’...He's the only non-opera writer of true theater music around today.¹¹

⁹ Alec Wilder, *American Popular Song: The Great Innovators, 1900-1950*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 93.

¹⁰ Zadan, *Sondheim & Co*, 7. Despite Babbitt's comments, some musical theater composers were musically educated, even if many of them chose not to write or study extensively so-called “serious music.”

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

In fact, many scholars and critics, whether advocates of Sondheim's work or not, have affirmed how influential he has been on the musical. When *Anyone Can Whistle*—Sondheim's second show on Broadway in which he wrote both the music and lyrics—was reviewed, Whitney Bolton of the *Morning Telegraph* wrote:

If *Anyone Can Whistle* is a success, the American musical theater will have advanced itself and prepared the way for further freedom from now old and worn techniques and points of view...it is a bright step toward a more enlightened and cerebral musical theater.¹²

The show was not a commercial success; however, the “cult” following the show has gained, along with the quality of the original Broadway cast recording, and even the 2010 revival at the New York City Center theater, proves that the score is an artistic success. When the show closed after only nine performances, the original cast album was recorded because Columbia Records's Goddard Lieberson “felt obligated to see that a permanent record was made of what he considered one of Broadway's most important scores.”¹³

Critics have since come to realize Sondheim's influence on the art form. Clive Barnes, one of the most important critics of theater for the *New York Times* said “Mr. Sondheim must be one of the most sophisticated composers ever to write a Broadway musical,”¹⁴ and when *Sondheim: A Musical Tribute* premiered, *New York* magazine critic Alan Rich said the show “was to pay homage to the man who, all by himself, has

¹² Ibid., 94.

¹³ Ibid., 95.

¹⁴ Ibid., 127.

restored...quality and...self-respect to the American musical theater...Sondheim stands alone...[and] has raised this art to a new plateau of greatness.”¹⁵

In the introduction to his groundbreaking text *Sondheim & Co.*, Craig Zadan offers that Sondheim

maintains and reaffirms his position as the reigning talent and motivating force of the American musical theater. Sondheim, along with his distinguished collaborators, has continued to break old traditions by stretching the conventional and rigid musical into a new-fashioned art, a thinking person’s form of entertainment.¹⁶

Zadan’s realization of Sondheim’s musical merit has been echoed again and again by scholars, critics and audiences. What is it that makes Sondheim such an important figure in twentieth-century American musical theater? Many scholars have their own ideas of what makes Sondheim’s contribution to the theater important. Although groundwork has been completed for securing Sondheim’s place as a progenitor of American musical theater, few of them focus on any kind of stylistic musical analysis.

A style analysis of any composer illuminates both what is typical of compositional techniques, forms and practices for a given time period, and how particular composers show creative innovation within and apart from what is usual. In similar ways, a study of Sondheim’s style within the context of late twentieth-century American

¹⁵ Ibid., 205-06. Often, comparisons are made between Sondheim and Andrew Lloyd Webber, another leader of post-1950s musical theater. Lloyd Webber has found great commercial success through musicals such as *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Cats*, and *The Phantom of the Opera*. These musicals have proven to be commercially successful around the world, and yet Lloyd Webber is tended to find less acceptance among critics and scholars. Stephen Citron makes much of this comparison in *Sondheim and Lloyd-Webber: The New Musical*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁶ Ibid., viii. Zadan’s text is groundbreaking because it was the first significant book written on Stephen Sondheim’s musicals. It examines Sondheim through multiple theatrical perspectives, with musical discussion coming through direct quotations.

musical theater provides an understanding of how he distinguishes himself from other composers as a seminal figure of this genre. Because so much of what is held in value of Sondheim's musicals is the music itself, I offer here a theory of Stephen Sondheim's musical style. The dissection and interrelation of identifiable musical factors that take place within and between his shows provide a foundation for making stylistic generalizations about Sondheim's body of work.

Existing Sondheim Scholarship

Although Stephen Sondheim has become a recognizable name among scholars, there are a relatively small number of truly scholarly, musical sources written about his scores. Among a bibliography of sources written about Sondheim's music, only a few truly stand up to the scrutiny of musical scholarship. These include Stephen Banfield's *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals*, Steve Swayne's *How Sondheim Found His Sound*, Joanne Gordon's *Art isn't Easy: The Theater of Stephen Sondheim*, and Mark Eden Horowitz's *Sondheim on Music*.¹⁷

Banfield's text can be divided into two sections. The first section, comprising the first two chapters, provides a biography of Sondheim and examines his compositional process. In the second section, which begins with the third chapter, Banfield approaches each of Sondheim's musicals from *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962) to *Into the Woods* (1987) and analyzes specific musical, social, cultural and dramatic idioms in every one of the shows. Because of the huge scope of material

¹⁷ There are also a number of literary studies, theater studies, biographies, dissertations and individual articles that discuss Sondheim on an academic level.

covered, and the multiple approaches, Banfield's study favors breadth over depth, and opens the door for other scholars to develop these ideas further.

Swayne's text takes a different approach. Using his dissertation as a springboard, he attempts to come up with what he calls a "style" for Sondheim, claiming that what is important about his style is not only musical, but intricately tied to text and dramatic factors as well. He deals with a study of musical influences, taking into account Sondheim's personal discography and quotations from the composer to make some correlations with musical devices of some late Romantic composers, such as Ravel, Satie and Rachmaninoff. After this, he examines how the creators of Golden Age Broadway musicals and a love for the cinema influenced Sondheim musically and dramatically. He examines one of Sondheim's songs from the movie *Dick Tracy* and then tackles the creation of the musical scene "Putting it Together" from *Sunday in the Park with George*. Swayne's general conclusion is that the dramatic issues control everything else in each of Sondheim's shows, and so musical factors take a backseat to issues of drama.

Gordon provides an analysis and criticism of Sondheim's output from *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* through *Assassins*. Much of the focus is on the theatrical elements, and there is little analysis of music.

Horowitz's book is the most influential for a music-theoretical study, because it is a collection of interviews the author had with Sondheim himself that directly concern the structure of the music and the process of composing it. Sondheim answers direct questions about the scores and his process, which opens the doors to deeper analytical possibilities and creation of theories on his music.

All these texts have rather limited musical-theoretic analysis of Sondheim's work, and are thus used here as a starting point for an in-depth analysis of the musical style of Stephen Sondheim. Specific quotations from the composer himself in many of these and other sources generate much of the following analysis.

Style in Sondheim

Sondheim makes the claim that "I have to go for something I haven't done before, because if it's territory revisited it bores me to write. I don't feel I'm using myself."¹⁸ Despite this desire to constantly do something new, Sondheim also realizes that his work has something that ties it all together: "I also don't think [*A Little Night Music*] was as great a departure for me as some have said it was. It's all of a fabric—just another segment of my work."¹⁹ When confronted with the question of his musical style, he said:

I don't know how I would describe myself because I am so eclectic. People say they hear my style... I know there are certain chords I use over and over and over again...²⁰ What you listen for in music, is a voice. Even if you hear where it comes from. I'm eclectic the way [Leonard Bernstein] was eclectic. But I've a voice, I've a voice.²¹

As stated above, Swayne concludes repeatedly that Sondheim's musical style is completely dependent on dramatic context. Although dramatic context is absolutely crucial to musical theater, Sondheim has a recognizable musical style that permeates even his eclectic collection of dramatic theater works. This style is evident when listening to

¹⁸ Stephen Sondheim, "The Musical Theater: A Talk by Stephen Sondheim," *Dramatists Guild Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (1978): 8.

¹⁹ Zadan, *Sondheim & Co*, 194.

²⁰ Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 49.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

the musical recordings, which are the foremost medium in which his music is accessed, and are outside of the theatrical context. As Zadan says, “When all is said and done, the Stephen Sondheim legacy will be most remembered by the cast recordings of his shows.”²² The original cast audio and video recordings are the primary source for Sondheim’s musical sound, due to their commercial accessibility. Even shows that flop—that is, close early and lose their investment—like *Anyone Can Whistle* and *Merrily We Roll Along* have developed a strong fan base through the cast recordings. New directors may stage the shows with new interpretations, actors may play characters differently, but the familiarity with the shows primarily comes through the original cast recordings. Changes between what is heard on the recordings and what is heard in the theater are minimal, since Sondheim will rarely allow for a song that was cut from the original show to be placed back into a revival—as he did in the London production of *Follies*—or for a new arrangement of an existing song to be done—like the additional characters and material in the 2002 Broadway revival of *Into the Woods*.²³

The word “style” takes on a number of uses throughout scholarship. Even by limiting the use of the word to Sondheim scholarship, style is used in reference to music, theater, and so forth. The distinction this study makes from those of Swayne and other authors comes from concentrating on the music first, although dramatic context is established to show how the music works with and against it. Even in the category of

²² Zadan, *Sondheim & Co*, 174.

²³ See Mark Eden Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2010), 122. *Merrily We Roll Along* did undergo extensive revising in attempts to fix the issues that caused it to flop. Orchestrations might also change in revivals of shows.

music, style might be referring to such things as a particular composer, performer, or genre.

In essence, this study seeks to answer the challenges brought forth by both Steve Swayne and Joseph Swain. Swayne writes in his dissertation about Sondheim's imitative voice versus his "composerly" voice. He focuses on the imitative voice, dealing especially with Sondheim's extensive use of pastiche in shows like *Follies* and *Assassins*. Swayne then provides a challenge: "[the musicals] written in the composerly voice...await greater analysis in a monograph devoted to the exploration of that voice."²⁴ After this, he presents Joseph Swain's review of Stephen Banfield's work, where Swain states: "still more puzzling is the lack of any general overview of Sondheim's musical style."²⁵ Swayne adds, "with all the numerous strengths of Banfield's book...it is not a study of musical style. In fact that study has not yet been written and this thesis clearly does not focus on uncovering Sondheim's musical language *en toto*."²⁶ The following document is an answer to Swayne's challenge, and an attempt to at least begin to decipher Sondheim's musical style.

Methodology

This study takes into account all of Sondheim's theater works in which he wrote both music and lyrics.²⁷ It begins with musico-dramatic analyses in the first chapter that

²⁴ Steve Swayne, "Hearing Sondheim's Voices" (Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1999), 318.

²⁵ Joseph P. Swain, "Review: Stephen Banfield's *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals*," *Music & Letters* 76, no. 1 (February 1995): 134.

²⁶ Swayne, "Hearing Sondheim's Voices," 319.

establish the dramatic context in which the music is written, as well as Sondheim's continuation of, and departures from, the traditions of American musical theater. Musico-dramatic relationships within songs, within shows and across his body of work are of a distinctive, compositional voice. The following three chapters contend that Sondheim writes in a style that is recognizable because of certain musical factors, especially accompaniment, harmony and melody. A variety of music-analytic tools used for many types of music prove useful for these analyses. By showing how these musical factors contribute to the recognizability of Sondheim's scores, one can begin to establish a theory of Sondheim's musical style.

The sources that the analyses take into account include the published piano/vocal scores, recorded productions of the musicals, cast recordings, biographical readings, published interviews with Sondheim, interviews with creators involved with his productions, and other musical or theatrical resources that establish context.²⁸

Jonathan Tunick has stated, "Steve's music is...written with full piano accompaniment."²⁹ The published piano/vocal scores are often the materials Sondheim

²⁷ I am omitting any discussion of musical revues of his songs. This includes *Marry Me A Little*, *Putting it Together*, *Sondheim on Sondheim*, and so forth. Also omitted is *Saturday Night*, written for the 1955 Broadway season, which was not staged until the late 1990s. It made it to forty-five performances off-Broadway, but no commercially available score exists.

²⁸ The only musical excerpts made available in this document are from *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, and *Anyone Can Whistle*, due to copyright restrictions on all of Sondheim's other works. Examples used from the remaining shows will be referred to by title of show, title of song, and specific measure numbers from commercially available scores (*Company*, *Follies*, *A Little Night Music*, *Pacific Overtures*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, and *Assassins*) or the Music Theatre International piano/conductor scores (*Merrily We Roll Along* (revised version), *Into the Woods*, and *Passion*).

gave to his orchestrators.³⁰ Broadway musicals are difficult to study because in the process of creation, and through revivals of shows, many changes take place and even continue to take place because Sondheim has revised previous works. To limit this, the primary sources of analysis are the published vocal scores along with the original Broadway cast recordings and—if available—Broadway video recordings. The productions considered for the analysis are listed in Appendix A.

Some productions approach Sondheim's score in fundamentally different ways that clearly alter the "sound" of the music, but not necessarily the style. The best example here is *Sweeney Todd*. In addition to the Broadway score's original Jonathan Tunick orchestrations, the 1984 Houston opera performance was re-orchestrated. So was the 2005 John Doyle production, in which the actors played the instruments on stage, with heavily scaled-down orchestrations. The 2007 Tim Burton film also changed the orchestrations yet again. Undoubtedly, orchestrators have a significant impact on the way an audience perceives the sound of the score, and orchestrators may even have their own style of arranging. Despite this and the dramatic changes in orchestration in the examples above, Sondheim's distinct style remains because the source is his incredibly detailed piano/vocal score. According to Sondheim:

I was trained classically, so I write a very complete piano copy. My instrument is the piano, and I don't hear specific orchestrations, although Milton Babbitt, who was my teacher, said I do hear orchestrally. I just don't know the instruments. I decided, as a matter of fact, starting with *Sweeney Todd*, that all the published vocal scores should be made from my piano copy....[A piano-conductor score]

²⁹ Zadan, *Sondheim & Co*, 156.

³⁰ In some of his earlier works, the published vocal scores are orchestral reductions. A piano reduction, as in the published scores before *Sweeney Todd*, may include material added by the orchestrator, musical numbers that are added and cut, re-orchestrated, rearranged, etc.

looks like piano music, but it isn't. And when you try to play that stuff, it often doesn't sound right...³¹

Also important is that Sondheim has only ever worked with a few orchestrators.

Jonathan Tunick has orchestrated a majority of his musicals, with only a few exceptions.

Michael Starobin stepped in for *Sunday in the Park with George* when Tunick was unavailable, and also did *Assassins*. For his first two shows, Sid Ramin and Irwin Kostal worked on *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* and Don Walker is given credit for *Anyone Can Whistle*.

Another issue raised is the amount of changes a show might go through, even after it has arrived on Broadway. The "songwriter" composers before Rodgers and Hammerstein could fairly easily replace a song within a given dramatic moment with another of like kind, such as a torch song, a list song, and so on.³² Sondheim works at his music differently, treating the score as a single piece of music, claiming, "with the exception of *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, I have never written, I think more than two songs for a show that weren't used."³³

Because *Merrily We Roll Along* did so poorly in terms of box office success, Sondheim and the creative team decided to perform major revisions on the show. It was

³¹ Stephen Sondheim, "Stephen Sondheim in a Q&A Pt. 1," *Dramatists Guild Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (1991): 10.

³² See Lehman Engel, *The American Musical Theater* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1975).

³³ Stephen Sondheim, "Q&A with Sondheim Pt. 2," *Dramatists Guild Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1991): 11. It is evident from his interviews with Mark Eden Horowitz that *Bounce/Road Show* jettisoned a number of songs before the final version came to Broadway; see Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 172.

revived at La Jolla Playhouse in 1985, but still was not particularly successful.³⁴ Where it is true that such revisions may change dramatic and musical elements, they do not affect the essential characteristics of Sondheim's musical style.

There are a variety of approaches to style analysis, all of which have pros and cons. Definitions and theories of style have been posited by a number of scholars. Leonard B. Meyer's definition of style provides the foundation for the methodology and theory of this study on Sondheim. In *Style and Music: Theory, History and Ideology*, Meyer defines style as "a replication of patterning, whether in human behavior or in the artifacts produced by human behavior, that results from a series of choices made within some set of constraints."³⁵ Sondheim's style will be determined by analyzing particular musical features that make his compositional voice recognizable throughout his body of work. This study explores uncharted territory in a number of ways. Many of the methodologies for analysis create tools or synthesize existing tools in ways that have not been done before, and admittedly, future scholars may find easier ways of relating these issues.

Babbitt mentioned in an earlier quotation that Sondheim wanted to write "within the obvious restraints of a Broadway musical." Although he does not identify these in particular, it will be assumed that among these restraints—or after Meyer, constraints—are mostly tonal—or at least modal—melodies and harmonies, traditional thirty-two bar musical theater song forms, fairly regular meters, simple textures of melody with

³⁴ Ken Mandelbaum, "How Did You Get to Be Here, Mr. Sondheim? *Merrily We Roll Along* to Washington, D. C.: Analysis and Review," *Theater Week*, 26 Feb 1990, 19.

³⁵ Leonard B. Meyer, *Style and Music: Theory, History, and Ideology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 3.

accompaniment, etc.³⁶ However, Sondheim's particular choices involve expanding traditional notions of these constraints, particularly in the way he uses accompaniment, harmony and melody.

In his book on style analysis, Jan LaRue argues that "It is the first task of style analysis to explain as far as possible both the character of movement and the enduring shape of music."³⁷ LaRue continues: "the first axiom for the analyst seeking completeness is to begin by looking at the piece as a whole, not as parts, not even as a collection of parts."³⁸ This, he states, helps with the sense of movement within the piece. The question is whether or not this holds true for a theater work, since it is comprised of multiple, individual songs. Cases vary by composer, but such works are more prevalent in the post-Rodgers and Hammerstein era, with examples in the works of Leonard Bernstein (*West Side Story*), Andrew Lloyd Webber (*The Phantom of the Opera* (1988)), and Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil (*Les Misérables* (1987)). In many cases, the primary force that holds a musical together is the drama. The musical numbers are distinct entities, with linking material coming from repeated themes or reprised numbers. These can be compared to number operas from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

LaRue's comments are particularly cogent when considering Sondheim. Although individual songs can be extracted from any Sondheim show, it is clear from the

³⁶ These constraints are generalizations of the music of a majority of mainstream musical theater composers. There are certainly exceptions of composers who have written outside of these constraints in Sondheim's lifetime.

³⁷ Jan LaRue, *Guidelines for Style Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Warren, Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 1992), 2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

composer's often stated comments that he conceives of each of these shows as a single piece:

I like to work very closely with the book writer and structure everything for weeks before we start writing...I like to subsume my collaborators and have them subsume me. That always makes for an integrated piece, which is something I was brought up to do by Oscar Hammerstein. What satisfies me the most in the musical theater is the sense of one piece.³⁹

In another setting, he says, "I learned from Milton the means of holding an ear over a period of time, how you keep someone listening for 45 minutes so that at the end they feel they've heard a piece."⁴⁰ Sondheim treats each of his works not only as a single piece of music, but also takes careful consideration to intricately wed his music to lyrics and drama—a modern conception of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

An exception to this is *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, which was one of the few non-integrated scores he wrote.⁴¹ Sondheim saw this show as experimental because "*Forum* is a direct antithesis of the Rodgers and Hammerstein school. The songs could be removed from the show and it wouldn't make any difference." This approach links this show to the non-integrated musical comedies like Porter's *Anything Goes*. Shevelove elaborates on this:

³⁹ Sondheim, "Stephen Sondheim in a Q&A Pt. 1," 13. Sondheim benefited from an extremely close relationship and informal apprenticeship with Hammerstein that is detailed in Stephen Banfield, *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals*, (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), 11-15.

⁴⁰ Samuel G Freedman, "The Words and Music of Stephen Sondheim," *The New York Times Magazine*, April 1 1984, 19.

⁴¹ The other non-integrated scores are arguably *Follies*—as Sondheim points out in a later quotation—and *Assassins*, of which he says: "it's a collection of songs." "There is no attempt here to make a 'score' except insofar as it relates to the characters." Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 57.

When Steve first started, he only wanted to write songs integrated into the show that would advance the plot and increase your knowledge of the characters. I tried to tell him that the songs don't have to do that. Plays have breathers, too, and in *Forum* the songs can be respites.⁴²

Sondheim's initial aspiration of writing songs that are integrated into the show proved to be more befitting of his personal style. After *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, Sondheim's music becomes increasingly integrated with the drama. Sondheim's first attempts while he was in college, as well as the long-unproduced *Saturday Night* and even into *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, are where Sondheim was experimenting with his style. It is after *Anyone Can Whistle* that Sondheim's voice began to solidify. Zadan says, "The techniques and styles Sondheim experimented with and the work he developed under the tensions of the production of *Whistle* inevitably led to his future triumphs in creating new forms in his work."⁴³

Because Sondheim considers each his works to be "of a piece," LaRue's reductionist methodology is one useful tool for approaching his music. However, since there are so many musicals, and so many aspects of music to consider, it is helpful to focus the analysis on a few essential musical parameters. A recorded interview with Sondheim provides a methodology that mirrors his compositional process. This interview suggests one way to make this study much more feasible by limiting the musical parameters used and dictating their order.

When asked by Trevor Herbert how initial ideas for songs present themselves, Sondheim responded:

⁴² Zadan, *Sondheim & Co*, 68.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 95.

I'm always working with tools that have been set up for me, that is to say the characters, the situation, the ambiance, and what I try to do is find a way of conveying that musically...Generally what I try to do is to get an accompaniment figure, even in the more lyrical pieces that I write, that is to say the slower pieces...just something that will suggest both the motion of the piece and the emotion of the piece⁴⁴... And so I came up with this accompaniment figure [for *Sweeney Todd*]⁴⁵—I usually start with an accompaniment figure when I write a song, even ballads, meaning slow lyrical pieces, I tend to build on either harmonic or rhythmic principles. Sometimes a melodic idea will occur to me, but since good melodic writing implies the harmony underneath it...I will often start with the harmonic structure because for me what gives music its distinction is its harmonic line⁴⁵... However there is also, because I am also a lyric writer, the possibility of starting, as I do sometimes, with a lyric idea, an idea for either a frame line or a phrase or something which suggests a rhythm, not necessarily a melodic profile but a rhythm.⁴⁶

He gives the example in “The Ballad of Sweeney Todd,” from *Sweeney Todd*, of the line “Attend the tale of Sweeney Todd,” and discusses how this implies a $\frac{6}{8}$ rhythm, which also suggests an “old ballad.” He continues his discussion on how lyrics, rhythm, and melody relate: “quite often the lyric will dictate a melodic idea just by the way the words rise and fall. I am always very concerned with the setting of the language as it is spoken.”⁴⁷

Although the examples in the interview deal specifically with *Sweeney Todd* and later with *A Little Night Music*, it can be implied from his statements that Sondheim uses a similar process for composing each of his shows. His statements also establish a workable methodology. By establishing context with the relationship between music and

⁴⁴ Trevor Herbert, "Sondheim's Technique," *Contemporary Music Review* 5 (1989): 199.

⁴⁵ Ibid.: 200.

⁴⁶ Ibid.: 201.

⁴⁷ Ibid.: 202.

drama, and then moving to an analysis of accompaniment, harmony and then melody, one can infer patterns in Sondheim's compositional process, and thus a musical style. The use of rhythm and meter will be incorporated into each of the above musical categories, particularly discussions and categorizations of accompaniment patterns. The choices he makes rhythmically and metrically in his accompaniment patterns are tied to the dramatic image he is trying to convey. Also, because text is so integral to Sondheim's setting of melody, rhythm is intricately tied to patterns of speech. As this analysis examines each element in more detail, it will spotlight appropriate analyses of rhythmic and metric salience when they clearly contribute to stylistic recognizability.

Chapter 1. Dramatic Concerns

Content dictates form

—Stephen Sondheim¹

In his book, *How Sondheim Found His Sound*, Steve Swayne first approaches Stephen Sondheim's music from a dramatic standpoint.² Sondheim describes his initial steps in composing for the musical theater: "I've discovered over a period of years that essentially I'm a playwright who writes with song, and that playwrights are actors. And what I do is I act. So what I'll do is, I'll go upstairs, and I'll get... into the character."³ Dramatic concerns constitute the beginning of Sondheim's creative process for all of his shows. Because he begins with dramatic concerns as his top priority in the compositional process, I will argue that they ultimately shape the way in which Sondheim writes his music, from the level of phrase in a song to portray a character's moment-to-moment motivation to the musico-dramatic arc of the entire show. Dramatic content creates the tapestry on which the music is set, and ultimately shapes the musical form. At the same time, Sondheim will also use music to heighten moments of drama. The ways in which music and drama work together are a significant basis for further aspects of Sondheim's musical style.

¹ Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 223. Sondheim says this in multiple sources.

² See Steve Swayne, *How Sondheim Found His Sound* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

³ Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 25.

New York Times literary critic Michiko Kakutani states that Sondheim

like[s] to write within a set of restrictions; and his earlier shows have often used a show's subject matter as a framework for composition. *Sweeney Todd* employed a 'gnarled' operatic score to play off the Grand Guignol nature of its material. *Pacific Overtures* featured open, stripped-down songs that captured the feeling of traditional Japanese music.⁴

The restrictions Kakutani mentions deal with traditional idioms of the American musical theater. Sondheim follows conventions of a mostly tonal harmonic vocabulary, dramatic storytelling that is broken into acts and scenes to tell a narrative, and even uses conventional musical forms as the basis for some of his songs. He then uses these basic frameworks as a set of guidelines on which he allows the subject matter of the dramatic material to shape the form of the music, and give the musical score a sense of unity, in the modernist sense of the word. Sondheim elaborates on this:

To make a score sound like a score when it's interrupted by great chunks of dialogue is difficult...I have used arbitrary methods...Certainly leitmotifs are useful (but a very bald device...). In *Night Music* I put everything in some form of triple time so that the whole score would feel vaguely like a long waltz with scherzi in between so that no song would seem to have come from another texture. In the case of *Pacific Overtures* I kept a very limited harmonic language, with very little harmonic motion in the songs...nothing whatsoever holds the *Follies* score together... I'm a firm believer of content dictating form... I tried to hold the score of *Company* together through subject matter...*Anyone Can Whistle* is sort of a music student's score. The whole score is based on the opening four notes of the overture, which is a second going to a fourth.⁵

Because he works to incorporate musical and theatrical aspects in such a close relationship, it is important to begin with a dramatic context in which to study the musical style of Sondheim's works. Musical choices are affected by drama, and so musical features such as an accompaniment patterns, harmonic vocabulary, or melodic

⁴ Michiko Kakutani, "How Two Artists Shaped an Innovative Musical," *New York Times*, June 10 1984, 1.

⁵ Sondheim, "Q&A with Sondheim Pt. 2," 13.

construction might find similarity in the ways they reflect character, mood or dramatic action.

Another important reason for analyzing the relationship between music and dramatic structure is to show that although Sondheim stands apart from his American musical theater predecessors and contemporaries in a number of ways, he is still deeply embedded in the traditions of the genre. Some scholars have wondered whether it is more appropriate to give Sondheim's work another label, such as opera, operetta, music drama or the most popular label—the concept musical. Judith Sebesta discusses the difficulty scholars have in defining “music theater” or “musical theater.”⁶ Sebesta's findings are that many who use the term “music theater” are referring to opera and operetta, and European traditions. “Musical theater,” on the other hand, deals with American traditions.⁷ She discusses how one distinction between opera and musical theater was that opera was entirely sung through, but more and more musicals are being entirely set to music. None of Sondheim's musicals are entirely sung through. The closest to this are *Sweeney Todd* and *Passion*, which have both been produced by renowned opera companies with operatically trained singers. This blurs the distinction between opera and musical theater even more.

A similar blurring of the lines comes in discussing operetta versus musical theater. Operetta is typically used to discuss works that are basically light operas with dialogue from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They usually require

⁶ Judith Sebesta, "Something Borrowed, Something Blue': The Marriage of the Musical and Europe," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical, 2nd Edition*, ed. William Everett and Paul Laird (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 272.

⁷ Ibid.

highly trained singers, are usually more sophisticated musically than musical theater, and often take place in exotic locations.⁸ Famous composers of operetta were Gilbert and Sullivan (*The Pirates of Penzance*), Franz Lehár (*The Merry Widow*), Rudolf Friml (*Rose Marie*) and Sigmund Romberg (*The Student Prince*). All of these composers came from European influenced musical backgrounds when it comes to music dramas. These works consist of spoken dialogue with songs that require significant vocal training and which are tied to the drama. *Passion* and *Sweeney Todd* arguably fall under this category because of their demands on many of the singers. However, Sondheim is not writing as much in the European traditions of these composers as he is in American traditions, which the rest of his body of work speak to even more so.

One attempt to label Sondheim's innovations in the musical theater comes in the term "concept musical."⁹ Joanne Gordon defines the concept musical as one that "suggests that all elements of the musical, thematic and presentational, are integrated to suggest a central idea or image."¹⁰ This is opposed to building a show around a narrative plot. This term does not separate Sondheim's musicals from American musical theater, but it does draw specific attention to the ways Sondheim realizes his musico-dramatic ideas. This term will be largely avoided here for two reasons: first, Sondheim loathes the

⁸ See Everett, "American and British Operetta in the 1920s: Romance, Nostalgia and Adventure," 72-88.

⁹ The "concept musical" is a term that is often used to describe Sondheim's musicals, but is not only applied to his works. Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Allegro* is sometimes credited as the first concept musical. See Swayne, *How Sondheim Found His Sound*, 149.

¹⁰ Joanne Gordon, *Art Isn't Easy: The Achievement of Stephen Sondheim* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), 7.

term.¹¹ Second, since he sees himself as a “playwright in song,” it is clear that narrative is of the utmost importance to him, even if it is not linear, as in *Company* or *Assassins*. Despite the ambiguity in terms and the desire for some to label Sondheim’s work in a different way, his influences and his training—especially his informal apprenticeship with Oscar Hammerstein II—root him in the American musical theater idiom.

Moving from labeling the work to analyzing it raises the issue of how one analyzes relationships between music and drama.¹² Some theorists and musicologists have approached this question in regards to opera and art song. In accordance with Sondheim’s quotation about content dictating form, Fred Everett Maus offers that “the analogy to drama [in Beethoven’s String Quartet op. 95, mvmt. 1] suggests that the structure of the music is its plot.”¹³ The plot not only affects the form of songs in Sondheim shows, but dramatic events also affect how the music is perceived through multiple levels of musical hierarchy.

A few methodologies in particular provide focus for the analysis of musico-dramatic relationships in Sondheim musicals. The first idea is finding a correlation between choices made in musical composition based directly on drama. David Lewin’s *Studies in Music with Text* supports a methodology in his first three chapters similar to

¹¹ Swayne, *How Sondheim Found His Sound*, 149. Sondheim simply says “You could call [*Allegro*] a ‘concept musical’—a phrase that I loathe, that was invented by critics.” One might summarise that Sondheim loathes the term because it is used so often to describe works that are a little less than typical that it has lost any real meaning.

¹² This summary has left out some noted authors who have tackled issues of music and text only because their work does not directly pertain to my analytic methods. Among these important contributors are Carolyn Abbate, Joseph Kerman, and Byron Almén.

¹³ Fred Everett Maus, “Music as Drama,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 10, 10th Anniversary Issue (Spring, 1988): 72.

what is used here, by examining musical choices made based on the text and subtext of the drama.¹⁴ The book spans a range of composers, including Mozart, Schubert, Clara and Robert Schumann, Wagner, Brahms, Schoenberg and Babbitt. He discusses musico-dramatic issues from a theoretical stance, including everything from analysis related to stage directions to Rameau's fundamental bass theory. He also uses musicological and even psychological analyses when talking about Freudian slips and social contexts for singers. Lewin suggests in his introduction that what he finds in his analyses often deal with "gestural" interrelations between music and text. Lewin's analysis is limited to art songs, and specifically the "German tradition(s)," as he calls it, in which he included Babbitt. However, the ways in which he shows how the text informs each composer's musical decisions is particularly relevant to Sondheim.

Another method is a Schenkerian/hierarchical approach to musico-dramatic relationships. One person who has laid significant groundwork in this type of study is Edward D. Latham. Latham offers a Schenkerian approach to twentieth-century American opera.¹⁵ His methodology includes character development along with musical development over the entirety of the operas he analyzes. In his book, Latham shows how an *Urlinie*—a fundamental, typically treble, musical line—In his book, Latham shows how an *Urlinie*—a fundamental, typically treble, musical line—connects multiple songs within a single opera.¹⁶ There are principles from Latham's book that are useful for

¹⁴ See David Lewin, *Studies in Music with Text* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁵ See Edward D. Latham, *Tonality as Drama: Closure and Interruption in Four Twentieth-Century American Operas* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2008).

examining the relationship of larger structures within and between songs in Sondheim's work. However, Sondheim still falls more in the traditions of twentieth-century Broadway songwriters, rather than those of twentieth-century opera composers. One idea that is adapted here from Latham is that of a dramatic interruption. In a typical two-act musical, the first act ends on a climactic moment where there is an unresolved conflict. The second act typically neither resolves the conflict nor continues it at the same intensity, but drops to a more stable level before it builds up again to a climax, and then resolves the conflict in the end.

Keeping in tradition with twentieth-century Broadway composers is David Carson Berry's work on melodic ascent in Irving Berlin songs.¹⁷ He offers the idea that melody and lyrics are neatly tied in musico-dramatic tension, so that when a melodic ascent occurs, it increases the tension, and vice-versa. He shows that Berlin's verses typically ascend melodically and bring about dramatic friction, creating a musical and dramatic tension that will be resolved in the chorus of the thirty-two-bar songs. Although Sondheim typically stretches song forms, this idea of increasing and decreasing musico-dramatic intensity is pivotal to arguing Sondheim's dramatic concerns.

This study offers more specific tools for engaging music and drama in Sondheim's output. One such way of determining where music and drama coincide is by using a synthesized model of determining musical and dramatic intensity, or a *Musico-*

¹⁶ Despite a Broadway composer's possible intent to have an *Umlinie*, it is unlikely to occur within musical theater. The actual key that a musical theater song is written in is usually arbitrary, because it is often changed for a particular performer.

¹⁷ See David Carson Berry, "Dynamic Introductions: The Affective Role of Melodic Ascent and Other Linear Devices in Selected Song Verses of Irving Berlin," *Intégral* 13 (1999).

dramatic intensity analysis. These graphic displays show how musical and dramatic intensity—including lyrics, dialogue and stage action—work together as part of Sondheim’s stylistic voice.

It is generally expected in musical theater that in most cases when there is an increase in dramatic intensity, there will be a correlating increase in musical intensity.

Sondheim’s offers:

Deciding what is to be sung and what is not to be sung is really what writing a musical is all about. It used to be simple in the Rodgers and Hammerstein days [approximating a Hammerstein quotation]: “When a moment reaches a point of emotion for which dialogue is no longer sufficient, then you sing it.”¹⁸

Through Sondheim’s interpretation, Hammerstein is basically saying that in the musical theater music is used as a means of conveying heightened drama. Sondheim talks about dealing with this idea in Jule Styne’s musical *Gypsy*—for which Sondheim was the lyricist:

In *Gypsy*, all the climaxes of emotion and action erupt into music because they can’t go further without it. A good character song does something that *can’t* be done by a line by the book writer. “Some People”... takes advantage of the fact that music can create intensity.¹⁹

Music typically increases dramatic intensity in the musical theater whether there is underscoring under dialogue or if words are being sung. The addition of musical sound competes with or complements dialogue or dramatic action, creating friction or heightening the moment and therefore increasing intensity. When moving from a scene of

¹⁸ Sondheim, "Stephen Sondheim in a Q&A Pt. 1," 11. His claim that “it used to be simple” may be an exaggeration. The intensity of Nellie’s outburst of racism to Emile in *South Pacific* would certainly qualify for a musical setting under Sondheim’s comment. However, it is not until Nellie leaves and the intensity drops slightly that Lieutenant Cable then sings “You’ve Got to be Carefully Taught” as a sort of disgusted rationale for her behavior.

¹⁹ Zadan, *Sondheim & Co*, 42.

spoken dialogue to a song, or even underscored dialogue, the intensity in the dramatic situation is heightened to a new level. From this point, the music and drama typically work parallel to each other, so that when one increases or decreases in intensity, so does the other. Sondheim's primary orchestrator, Jonathan Tunick, says "in a good song, the lyrics and the music climax at the same time."²⁰ In Sondheim's opinion

Words must sit on music in order to become clear to the audience. You don't get a chance to hear the lyric twice and if it doesn't sit and bounce when the music bounces, and rise when the music rises... the audience becomes confused.²¹

He understands that the attention of the senses is being competed for by the words and music. The skilled composer correlates the intensity in drama with musical intensity to create an augmented dramatic effect where both are clear and do not interfere with each other, unless specifically designed to do so.²²

There are also points at which dramatic intensity and musical intensity do not coincide. Sondheim occasionally does this purposefully. He continues:

But it's not that simple, I think, particularly now that shows have become more experimental and forms have started to break down, partly as a result of what Rodgers and Hammerstein did. Sometimes I think I just want the characters to sing just to surprise the audience—you didn't expect a song there—and another point where you think it's going to be sung, they speak...Also there are certain things that are hard to sing: 'Take out the garbage,' for example. That's always my little catch phrase for explaining why I don't like most opera, where they often spend as much time singing 'take out the garbage' (usually in recitative) as they do 'I love you.'...*Sweeney Todd* is mostly sung. There are, I think, eight scenes not musicalized, and I know how to musicalize five of them. I just never got around to it. But the other three I'll be damned if I know how to musicalize,

²⁰ Ibid., 156.

²¹ Ibid., 23.

²² Sondheim, like other musical theater and opera composers, does use the occasional ensemble number, in which several singers are singing competing lines at the same time. A prime example is the end of "Ladies in Their Sensitivities" in the second act of *Sweeney Todd*.

because they are very expository. Singing them would, if anything, blunt or even fog the exposition, whereas some of the other things could very well be sung and expanded and be more fun than they are. I'm afraid the only answer is personal choice.²³

Sondheim may purposefully make musical choices that go against expectation in terms of the drama. The musico-dramatic intensity analyses will show that, ultimately, the concerns of the drama govern the ways in which musical choices are interpreted. Likewise, musical choices may affect the perceived intensity of dramatic scenes.

The musico-dramatic intensity analyses are used in two ways: the first takes individual songs or musical scenes as “micro-dramas”; the second analyzes each of the shows as one large piece. Thomas Z. Shepard of Columbia Records claims that in Sondheim’s music, “every song is very often a scene in and of itself.”²⁴ By studying the graphs, one can see how Sondheim creates a recursive hierarchy of musico-dramatic action at every level of his musicals.

In order to create these analyses, parameters need to be established in order to identify increases or decreases in musical or dramatic intensity. Wallace Berry provides useful tools for considering musical intensity. Berry describes musical processes through his “‘intensity curve’ delineated by groupings and controlled associations of events underlying nearly all composed music.” He continues:

In music that is composed...actions (changes, events) involving various elements (lines of pitch change, tonal and harmonic succession, rhythm and meter, texture, and coloration) are so conceived and controlled that they *function* at hierarchically ordered levels *in processes by which intensities develop and decline*, and by which analogous feeling is induced...Essential to this concept is the principle that

²³ Sondheim, "Stephen Sondheim in a Q&A Pt. 1," 11-12.

²⁴ Zadan, *Sondheim & Co*, 176.

the sense of ‘motion’ in music...depends on change within one or more element-successions.²⁵

For increases in musical intensity, Berry provides the parameters set forth in table 1-1.²⁶

Some premises respecting intensity values within the spectrum of qualities pertaining to each of certain fundamental elements of musical structure.

Element	Progressive action: (crescendo)
<i>Melody</i> , a line of contiguous pitches	<i>Up</i> ; leap expecting closure, especially when dissonant; instability of tonal or other felt tendency
<i>Harmony</i> , the line of harmonic succession	<i>Away from tonic</i> ; dissonant; inverted; complex forms; chromatic (deviation from primary diatonic resource)
<i>Tonality</i> , the line of tonal reference	<i>Away from primary system</i> , in relation to tonal “distance” and assuming referential adherence of primary I; chromatic succession and expansion
<i>Meter</i> , the succession of accent-delineated units	<i>Toward shorter units</i> ; asymmetry and fluctuation; clarity of more frequent accent (acceleration); toward instability, departure from relational unit norm
<i>Tempo</i> , or rhythmic “pace”	<i>Acceleration</i> in rate of occurrence at given level
<i>Texture</i> , the line of changes in numbers and interactions of components	<i>Greater interlinear diversity</i> and conflict; increased density; wider spatial field
<i>Timbre</i> , events involving coloration, dynamic level, registral change, articulation	<i>Increased sonorous weight and penetration</i> (strings → woodwinds → brass?); louder; higher registers—sharper “focus” of intense color; more percussive, stressed articulation

Table 1-1. Berry’s Elements of Musical Intensity.²⁷

²⁵ Wallace Berry, *Structural Functions in Music* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976), 4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 11. This is Berry’s figure 0-1.

The musical elements break down as follows:

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 1) Melody | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) ascending motion b) leap c) tonal instability d) unresolved melodic tendencies |
| 2) Harmony | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) away from tonic b) increased dissonance c) inversion d) complex harmonies (extended tertian, quartal) e) chromatic harmonies |
| 3) Tonality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) modulation/tonicization or mode change b) chromatic succession and expansion c) move away from tonality into modality, atonality |
| 4) Meter | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) shorter units b) asymmetry and fluctuation c) acceleration d) departure from norm |
| 5) Tempo | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) acceleration |
| 6) Texture | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) diversity and conflict between lines b) increased density c) wider spatial field d) use of text* |
| 7) Timbre | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) dynamics b) higher register c) intense color change d) sharper articulations |

*This element has been added to Berry's originals

Table 1-2. Evaluating Musical Intensity.

²⁷ One limitation to this study is that it is impossible to precisely quantify changes in musical intensity. It would not make sense to say any modulation is worth two notches but a change in articulation is only worth one. The changes in intensity are taken into context, especially with the drama, to create a general movement toward increasing or decreasing intensity.

Like musical intensity, dramatic intensity can be measured through particularly defined elements. The elements of dramatic action are well stated in Gustav Freytag's Triangle, from his *Technique of the Drama* (1863).²⁸

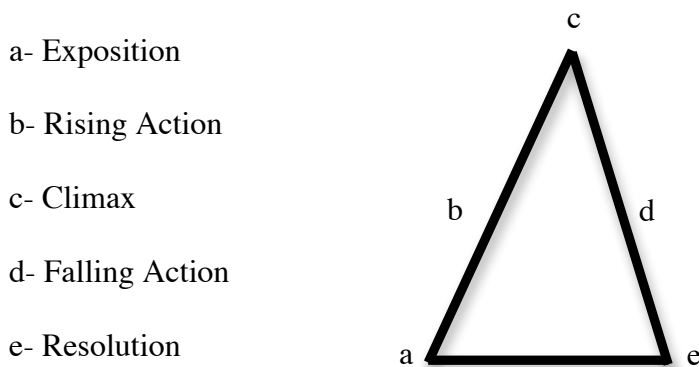


Figure 1-1. Freytag's Triangle.²⁹

Freytag's triangle is a theoretical construct of how dramatic action typically works.³⁰ In short summary, the parts of the triangle are described as follows: the exposition introduces characters and plot, and introduces the main conflict(s). The rising action brings the characters closer to the central conflict. Climax is the height of intensity,

²⁸ Adapted from Gustav Freytag, *Freytag's Technique of the Drama*, trans. Elias J. MacEwan (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1968), 115.

²⁹ The translation of Freytag's terms vary and have been modified by scholars. MacEwan's translation labels the parts as Introduction, Rise, Climax, Return or Fall, and Catastrophe.

³⁰ Dramatists since Freytag have further developed his model and some of the parts have been renamed for clarification.

at which the dramatic action comes to the central conflict. Falling action is the immediate aftermath of the conflict. Resolution is the final outcome of the conflict.³¹

There are many parallels to music, especially tonal music. Tonal music begins with tonic function that provides stability and a beginning point, much like an exposition. As the music progresses, it moves away from tonic, creating a rising action of mini-conflicts. It finally moves to the ultimate dominant, which acts as a climax of the tonal progression. The dominant is typically resolved to tonic, where the progression may encompass both the falling action and resolution. Thus the possibilities for associations with musical theater—which is typically tonal, dramatic music—are many.

Table 1-3 expounds on the Freytag categories. Because dramatic issues are more difficult to quantify, dramatic intensity on the graphs will follow the general shape of the Freytag triangle.³²

³¹ It is often difficult to separate falling action and resolution. They sometimes encompass the same events dramatically, depending on how the conflict is resolved. The falling action may be extremely quick, or may prolong the fallout of the conflict until a resolution occurs. Another issue with any representation of Freytag's triangle is having the resolution happen on the same plane as exposition. There is a journey throughout that ultimately affects changes in plot, characters, etc. This is just one of the limitations of using a two dimensional abstract.

³² Even more than music, an attempt to “quantify” dramatic intensity is inherently difficult. Some of the factors, such as volume, range of the voice, and such are decided by the individual actors or directors. In some cases, an action such as “raising the voice” may be included in the script. But this may be subsequently ignored by the director or actor. My decisions for dramatic intensity in the analyzed musicals come primarily from the score—the work—with the performances of the video recordings showing nuanced interpretations.

Freytag Category	Intensity Changes
<i>Exposition</i>	Adding characters, plot elements Relatively stable introduction of plot and characters, lower level of intensity and conflict
<i>Rising Action</i>	Accumulating mini-conflicts, plot thickens, issues need resolving, Moving toward central conflict, fluctuations of greater and lesser degrees of intensity that build over time
<i>Climax</i>	Central conflict at highest intensity
<i>Falling Action</i>	Toward resolution, intensity decreases
<i>Resolution</i>	None; Stable conclusion of plot

Table 1-3. Dramatic Intensity.

Although most linear narratives follow this model more or less, there are varying degrees of intensity within the sections, particularly within the rising action. As helpful as an abstract triangle can be to represent dramatic action, rising action does not occur on a constant, upward climb. As a Schenkerian ascent may be accompanied by reaching over, downward arpeggiations or other instances of composing-out a foreground descent, dramatic action typically has smaller-level descents in the overall ascent to the climax. On the general rise toward a climax, there will be increases and decreases of both musical and dramatic intensity. This can happen at the level of musical phrase, section, song, scene, act and entire show. Therefore, the triangle is only theoretically going to have a line that steadily increases towards climax, whereas in practice it will look more like the

re-imagined triangle of figure 1-2. The musico-dramatic intensity analyses portray the multiple levels by showing the ebbs and flows within the recursive categories of song, musical scene, act and show.

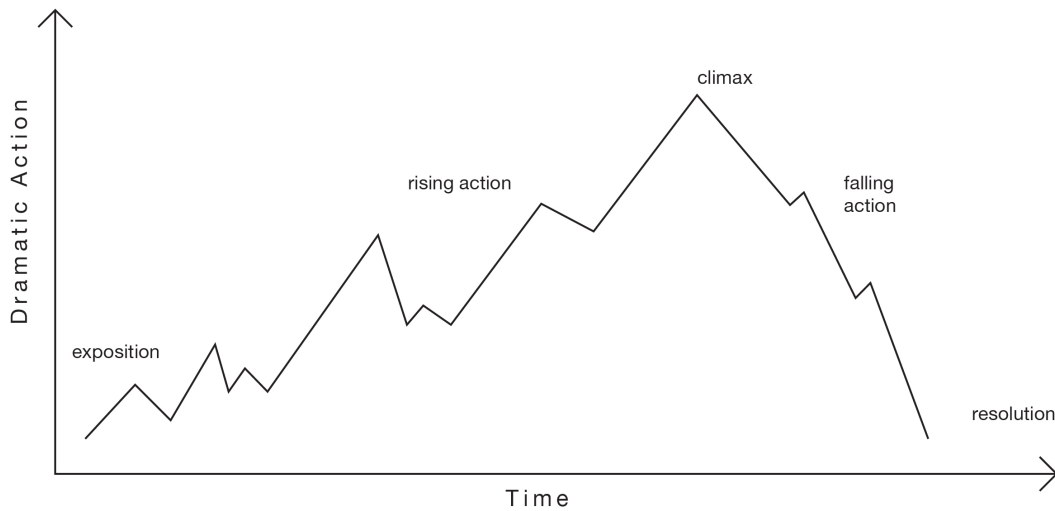


Figure 1-2. Re-imagined Freytag Triangle.

Sondheim's compositional process follows this kind of understanding of musico-dramatic form. An important aspect of Sondheim's songwriting is that he treats each song as though it were a complete dramatic form in itself, or a "micro-drama," stating that

[a song] is a worked-out scene, and I can instruct the actress how to play this scene, and the music is part of the dialogue. I can tell her why the music gets quick *here*, why it gets slow *here*, why there's a ritard *there*, why there's a so-called key change *here*, why it suddenly goes up and down—all of that—because I have reasons. Now the actress may choose to ignore them, but Donna [Murphy], who was just auditioning, did not have a chance to ask me, but she understood it. And this piece is psychologically very well laid out, and all it takes is a good actress to understand it exactly. It's one of the reasons why actors like to sing my stuff, because I'm essentially a playwright in song, and I'm not asking them to sing songs, I'm asking them to play scenes.³³

³³ Swayne, *How Sondheim Found His Sound*, 2.

He makes musical choices according to the dramatic implications. If each song in a Sondheim musical were a micro-drama, then theoretically it would also have its own Freytag triangle.

In fact, there are even more levels of recursion throughout all of Sondheim's works.³⁴ The songs stand alone as basic Freytag triangles, working their way through rising action to a climax, and typically falling off very quickly after the climax. Songs are often joined together within a dramatic scene to become what may be called a "musical scene."³⁵ These musical scenes—as well as dialogue that precedes, is interpolated within, or follows them—represent the next higher level of recursion. The individual acts are the next larger level, and the musical as a whole represents the final level of hierarchy. Graphically demonstrating these levels of hierarchy and comparing the musicals to each other reveals similarities in construction. This in turn affects how a listener perceives these musicals to be similar to each other, and thus creates a musico-dramatic style for Sondheim.

In *The Anatomy of Drama*, Martin Esslin offers a similar understanding of dramatic structure to Freytag, but includes recursive ideas.³⁶ Esslin uses arc shapes to show recursive ideas of suspense in a play. There is an overarching shape that represents the main question of the entire play, but within the play there are also questions of how a

³⁴ In some ways, Schenkerian levels of foreground, middleground and background can be applied to dramatic recursion.

³⁵ This chapter makes the argument that Sondheim brings about huge advancements to the musical scene in his works. However, the musical scene is not unique to Sondheim, dating back at least to Sid Romburg's first act finale of *The Student Prince*.

³⁶ Martin Esslin, *An Anatomy of Drama* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 43-54.

particular act, scene, or even line of dialogue are going to turn out. Figure 1-3 shows the different levels at which these processes can occur.³⁷

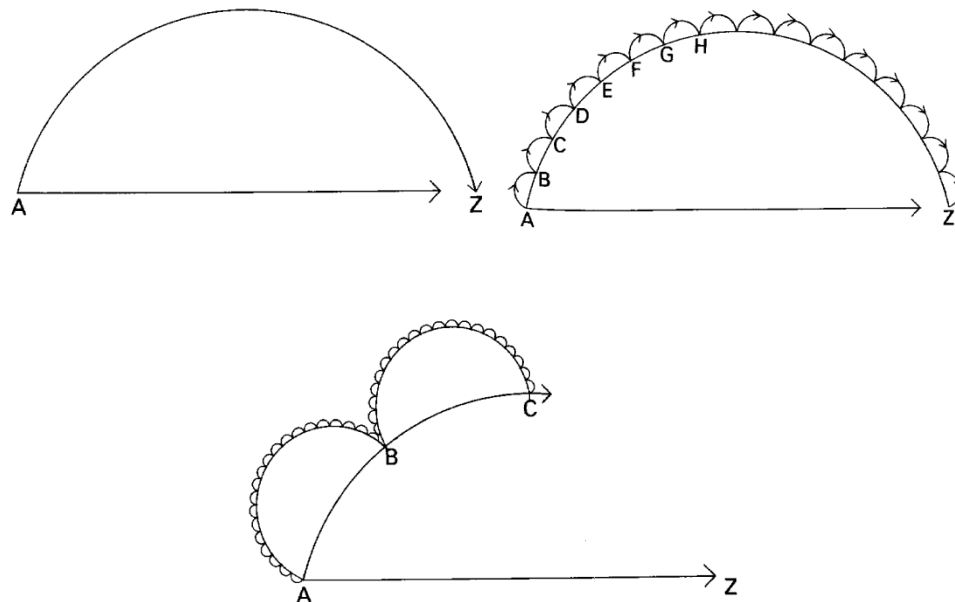


Figure 1-3. Esslin's Dramatic Structure.

By combining parts of Fretyag and Esslin diagrams with Berry's musical intensity parameters and reductive musical notation, musico-dramatic relationships are graphed as musico-dramatic intensity analyses. Figure 1-4 offers a recursive, musico-dramatic interpretation of Sondheim's musicals.

These recursive Freytag triangles are an effective analogy for a number of reasons. Most importantly, the climax of each smaller triangle generally falls along the rising action of each larger triangle. Therefore, each song, musical scene, or act

³⁷ Similar to Esslin's figures is the Koch curve from mathematics. Koch's snowflake displays recursive generation that shows a sense of hierarchy like Esslin, but outside of time and event.

accumulates mini-climaxes that cause the action to rise, eventually leading to the ultimate climax of the entire musical. These climaxes then discharge their accumulation after the final climax, resulting in a satisfying resolution of dramatic action.³⁸

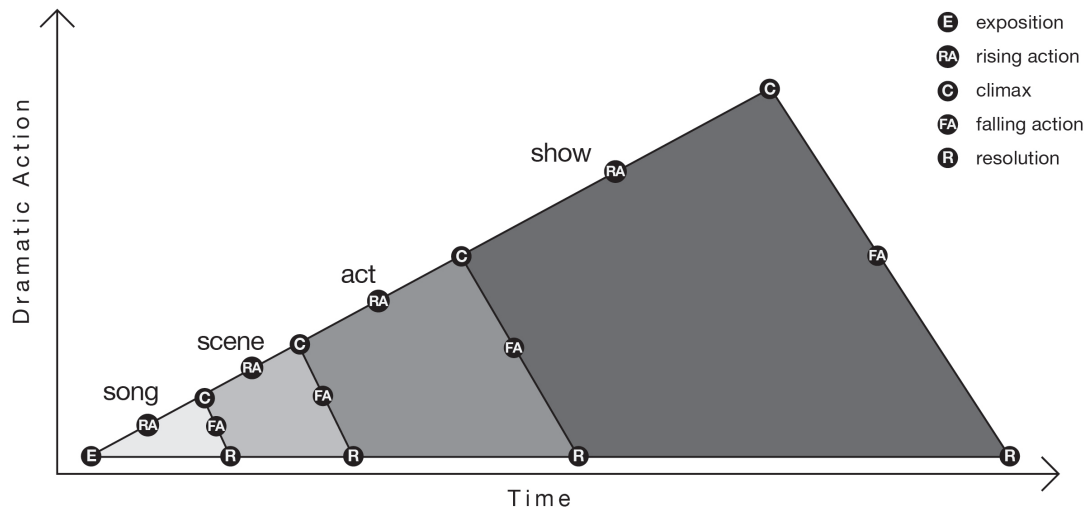


Figure. 1-4. Recursive levels in Sondheim's Musicals.

The musico-dramatic intensity analysis graphs also incorporate a musical staff that includes a reduction of the song or musical-scene from the piano/vocal score. The reduction will show the musical elements of progressive action and how they relate to the Freytag triangle, which will be placed underneath the staff.

An example of how a song can be analyzed using a music-dramatic intensity analysis is the song “Company” from the musical of the same title. The opening number of any musical is important because it sets the tone both musically and dramatically. “Company” follows a short scene of dialogue, and throughout this scene the audience

³⁸ This analogy of accumulation and discharge has roots in Daniel Harrison, *Harmonic Function in Chromatic Music: A Renewed Dualist Theory and an Account of Its Precedents* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

learns who the main character, Robert, is and they are introduced to his friends, who help drive the dramatic action of the non-linear plot.

The form of the song is essentially ||:ABC:||, with the repeat happening up a whole step and with different combinations of people singing. Musically, the A section begins homophonically, but the voices quickly become polyphonic in m. 5, creating a high level of intensity right away. The different couples are asking Robert to spend time with them, working as an exposition in that the audience is learning about the nature of these relationships.

The B section, at m. 25, is where all the couples come together homophonically again. They are all asking Robert the same thing—“Bobby come on over for dinner,” which ties the textural choice to the drama. Musically, the key changes from $D\flat$ to C, changing the level of intensity again. Because of the descent of pitch/key and the simplifying of the vocal texture, there is a slight decrease in intensity. The intensity rises again as the vocal harmony in m. 39 ends the section with extended-tertian dominant function.

Robert has the initial C section all to himself, which is essentially a self-reflection on his relationships with his friends. The intensity has dropped again since he is singing a solo line and the texture of the accompaniment has thinned out. In m. 57, the meter change to $\frac{6}{4}$ adds some intensity again, as Bobby sings of the love his friends show him. Robert’s line climaxes musically with an $A\flat 5$ in mm. 70-71 on the phrase “That’s what it’s really about!,” which also brings in the modulation to $E\flat$.

The repeat of the ABC is almost the same musically, except that the C section is sung by the entire company. In this way, the intensity drops again as the climax at m. 70 is abruptly interrupted by the return of A. The repeat traverses the same ebbs and flows of mini-climaxes and falling actions until the final climax of the song in mm. 161-171, on the word “Company!” Because of this intense climax on $\hat{5}$ (A6) until m. 172, the falling action and resolution have to both occur on the final octave Ds in the very last measure.

The musico-dramatic intensity analysis of this song (figure 1-5) shows that each of the small sections, represented by the dotted line, contains a Freytag triangle. There is a rise in both musical and dramatic intensity throughout each section. The entire first iteration of the ABC form climaxes at the A \flat 6, and then drops suddenly to the A’ section, which interrupts the rising action both musically and dramatically. The entire song material is repeated, but up a step, and with additional musical textures, creating a higher intensity than the beginning. The rest of the song rises in intensity until the musico-dramatic climax on the word “Company” on A6 in m. 161. The accompaniment brings the song to an end, but the final chord acts as both falling action and resolution of the music and the drama.

This type of analysis can be useful in looking at the musico-dramatic relationships of any composer of dramatic song. What sets Sondheim apart is his frequent and extensive use of the musical scene. Examining musical scenes from various shows using musico-dramatic intensity analyses will demonstrate how the musical and dramatic elements work together or against each other to bring about changing levels of musico-dramatic intensity. The scope of this study is limited to the small number of staged

musicals by Sondheim that have been recorded in entirety and made available for commercial use. They are—in chronological order—*Company*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Into the Woods* and *Passion*.³⁹

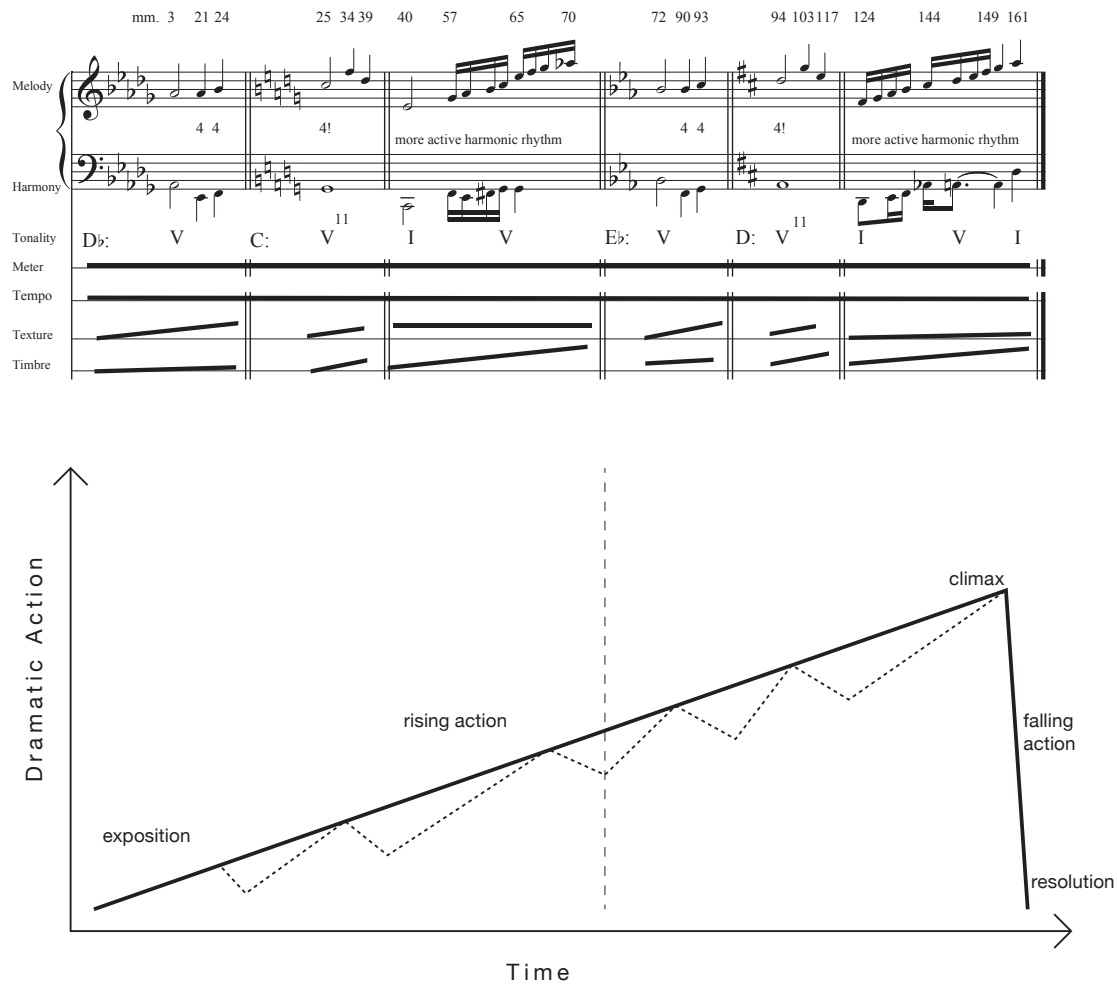


Figure 1-5. Musico-dramatic intensity analysis of “Company,” from *Company*.

Another limitation to this study is that, like a piece of concert music, musical theater is never repeated the same way twice in live performances, even by the same

³⁹ There is an available production of every Sondheim musical at the Theatre On Film and Tape archive at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; however, since scholars are limited to a single viewing of these tapes in a lifetime, it is impractical to fully analyze these recordings in this study.

group of performers. The recorded stage productions give a sample of what the show was like on Broadway, which is considered to be the height of musical theater professionalism. However, actors and musicians make different choices in terms of elements like dramatic pacing, musical tempi, and dynamics that can create different foreground or middleground spikes along the musico-dramatic span. A particular performance of any given work is one single interpretation along a continuum of historical interpretations. Therefore, it is unwise to speak of a single, recorded performance as the *Urtext*. To avoid this issue, I will make analytic decisions primarily on the printed scores. The performers's interpretations of musical and dramatic nuances in the recordings guide the analysis by offering a realization of the score, and will undoubtedly color some of the nuanced analytic choices. To help make particular choices less obtrusive, as many interpretations as possible have been viewed and listened to for this analysis.

A final concession to consider in analyzing Sondheim with musico-dramatic intensity analysis graphs is the changing importance in the role of particular musical elements depending on the level of hierarchy. Melody is of great importance within dramatic concerns of a single song, but there is little value in tracing melody across an entire act or show. Conversely, rhythmic/metric changes within a song typically deal more with intensity changes in the tempo category, where the meter typically remains constant. However, considering the metric changes from song to song and how intensity increases or decreases based on these changes is a more important background element.

After a brief plot synopsis, I will analyze one musical scene from each of the five shows with a musico-dramatic intensity analysis. One musical scene from each of

Freytag's categories represents dramatic action along the spectrum of exposition, rising action, conflict, falling action and resolution within the greater context of the entire show. After this, a general discussion and background graph will show how the acts and the shows are organized according to musico-dramatic intensity.

Company

The 2005 Broadway revival of *Company* was recorded for the PBS series *Great Performances*. Starring Raul Esparza as Robert, this production features a very different interpretation of Sondheim. Director John Doyle had previously revived *Sweeney Todd* with an interesting twist: as well as singing and acting the roles, the actors played the instrumental score on stage. Doyle perpetuated this format for the *Company* revival.

In order for the actors to both perform the drama and play the instruments, the score for both shows required paring down of the orchestration. Although this changes the timbre of the sound, the majority of Sondheim's notes, harmonies, rhythms and melodies stay intact. Comparing these productions to the original orchestrations by Jonathan Tunick shows that despite the different scorings, they still maintain Sondheim's style.

This is the most problematic of all of Sondheim's musicals when looking at dramatic intensity because there is not a traditional, linear narrative. However, when looking at how the different songs and scenes work together as a whole, the show still follows the model of Freytag's triangle as a complete narrative.

Most of the dramatic action takes place in scenes of dialogue. There are vignettes in which Robert, a bachelor, is observing and interacting with his married friends. The

show opens with the five couples throwing him a surprise birthday party. It is made clear that he is single, and he tells the audience that with friends like his, he has no need to be married. Despite what he says, it becomes clear through the vignettes that Robert has a great desire for marriage, even though he is terrified of the commitment. In the end, Robert realizes that he is ready to take that leap past his fears.

Sondheim says that although he started to find his compositional voice in *Anyone Can Whistle*, *Company* was the first show that was really his voice.⁴⁰ “Simple” in *Anyone Can Whistle* demonstrates a successful attempt to write a complex musical scene, and in *Company* he made musical scenes a true part of his style by using them more regularly. On the original cast recording of *Company* most of the songs sound like stand alone numbers, but when placed in the context of the show, the vignettes break many of them up, and some songs even elide into each other.

In “Simple,” Sondheim keeps a musical underscore going anytime there is dialogue between iterations of the familiar “grass is green/sky is blue” chorus and other melodic ideas.⁴¹ It is a huge number that encompasses six parts and forty-two pages of vocal score, if the linked finale is included. This will become the more regular use of musical scene in *Sweeney Todd* forward. In *Company*, the most frequent use is one in which the more typical song is broken up by dialogue absent of music. This happens in “The Little Things You Do Together,” and “Another Hundred People.” “Getting Married Today” is even more complex, since there are three melodic ideas going on: Jenny

⁴⁰ Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 191.

⁴¹ “Simple” is also called “The Interrogation” in the score.

singing the semi-diegetic wedding music, Paul singing his vows to Amy, and Amy singing about having cold feet. The three singers come together polyphonically at the end of the number, and in between sections of the song there are scenes of dialogue featuring Robert, Paul and Amy. The one number that contains a complete song form in which the song keeps going while the dialogue occurs is “Being Alive.” The way Sondheim handles this number increases the musico-dramatic intensity of what could be a typical thirty-two-bar song.

The musical scene takes place at the end of the show, and constitutes the climax of the entire musical. It begins with Robert, Joanne and Larry at a club, where Joanne and Robert have been drinking quite a bit. Joanne draws attention to herself through her obnoxious behavior, and then sings a toast to “The Ladies Who Lunch,” a song that is used as a social commentary. Joanne’s sarcastic bitterness climaxes musically and dramatically on the phrase “everybody rise!” After this, the music drops out, bringing the intensity down again. The dramatic intensity also drops a little, but Joanne’s behavior towards Robert makes it quickly rise again. She gets belligerent with him and asks him “Why would you [get married]?” He replies: “I don’t know, company?” She then propositions him after her husband Larry leaves, telling him “I’ll take care of you.” He responds, “Who will I take care of?” which she sees as a huge step for him towards opening himself up to a relationship. This in turn makes him very angry. He questions in return, “Like I haven’t looked at all that? And what do you get for it? What do you get?” At this line, the music enters again with the return of the opening “Bobby, Bobby”

accompaniment raising the level of dramatic intensity by adding a musical underscore in mm. 5-8.⁴²

Joanne and Larry leave and Robert asks again “What do you get?” increasing the dramatic intensity as he gets angrier. The company enters and sings the “Company” lyrics from mm. 9-19, increasing the intensity again by adding voices, and even more so as it becomes polyphonic. In m. 19, Robert yells “Stop!,” effectively stopping all the music and grinding the dramatic action to a halt, becoming the peak of the conflict. He asks, “What do you get?” one more time, but with more of a defeated tone.

Robert then begins singing “Being Alive.” After he sings each incomplete verse—the A section—a few ensemble members question him and encourage him to explore his thoughts and feelings.⁴³ There is a melodic line in mm. 28-32 that continues in the orchestra as they speak, so the dialogue interrupts the end of the musical phrase.

In his fourth iteration of the verse, Robert is finally able to complete the melodic line on the words “being alive” without the interruption from the ensemble, and is able to cadence on tonic for the first time. This line then becomes a mini climax and resolution within the song in mm. 66-75.

This resolution is short-lived, however, as the song then modulates up a step, increasing musical intensity, and one of the friends gives Robert one more encouraging

⁴² “Being Alive” begins on m. 5 in the score. Because of the regularity of adding and cutting material during the rehearsal process, when the score is sent to the publisher the measures numbers are often not fixed.

⁴³ It is likely at this point that the ensemble are not the actually Robert’s friends speaking to him, but rather Robert’s inner struggle being manifested in his relationship with these people.

thought, over the safety—a number of measures that the orchestra repeats under dialogue until the singer is able to enter—in m. 76.⁴⁴

From here, Robert takes the song as a solo. It has moved out of being a musical scene with interactions between characters—even if they are in Robert’s head—and becomes Robert’s own journey as a solo piece. There is a significant change of lyric, where before he was using impersonal pronouns—“someone to hold *you* too close”—he is now using personal pronouns—“somebody hold *me* too close”—which also increases the dramatic intensity. He sings thirty-two bars—a traditional length for Broadway—of the song, with the bridge being the true climax point of his inner struggle with commitment, where he decides “but alone is alone, not alive.” The music and drama peak in intensity as Robert holds tonic over a dominant pedal from mm. 114-117.

The intensity drops a little as the A section returns, only to crescendo again musically and dramatically, as he makes the decision that he resolves to “always be there, as frightened as you to help us survive being alive.” His last refrain of the A section climaxes on the words “being alive” with the highest pitch and dynamic in the piece giving the final mini-climax, which then resolves in a perfect authentic cadence. However, the highest melodic pitch of the piece—the F in m. 131—is not the ultimate climax of the piece. Instead, the final D^b of the bridge is the climax pitch because of the lyric, which is also aided by the musical conflict of dominant functioning harmony against tonic in the melody.

⁴⁴ The purpose of the safety will be explained in the next chapter.

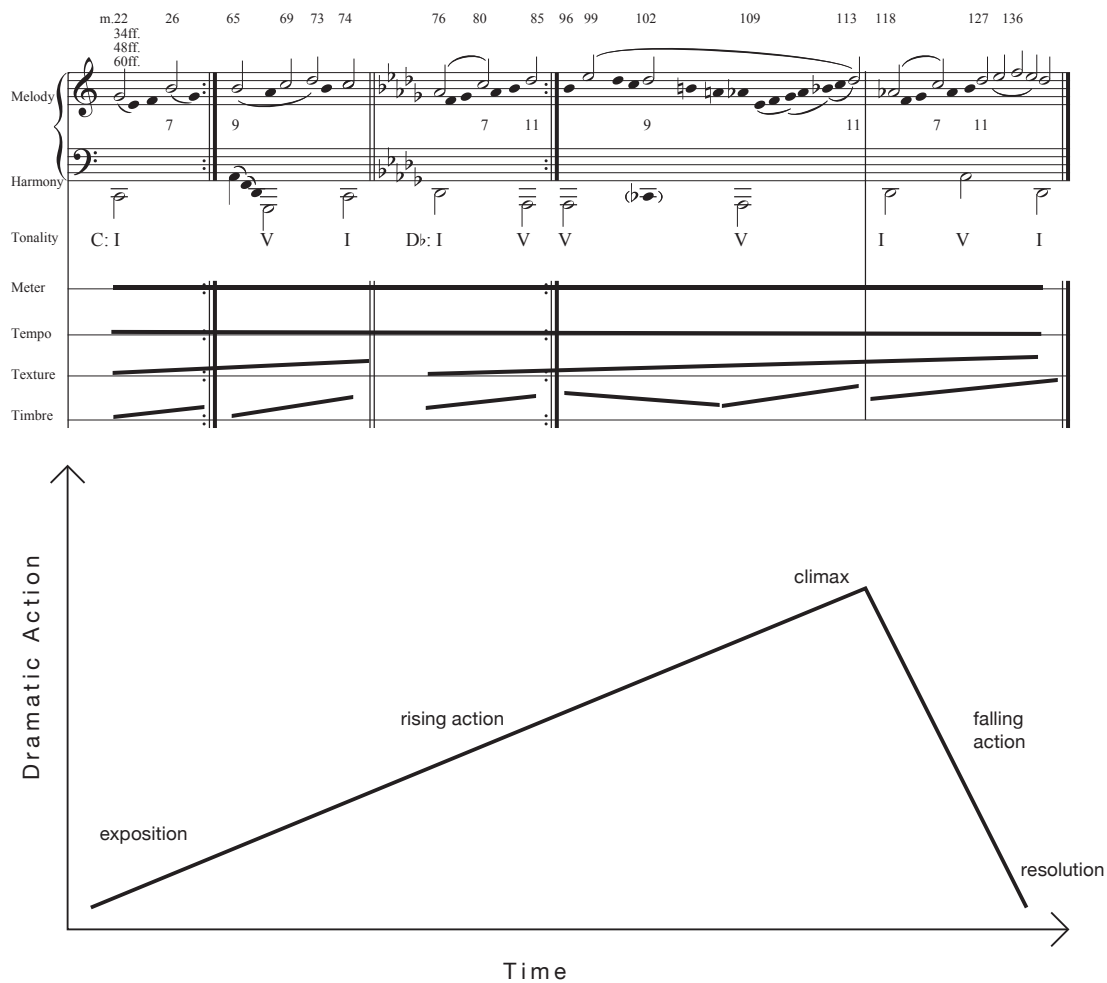


Figure 1-6. Musico-dramatic intensity analysis of “Being Alive,” from *Company*.

As for the show as a whole (see figure 1-7), because *Company* is a non-linear musical, the climax at the end of the first act has less of a narrative effect than most traditional Broadway shows.⁴⁵ The show is about Robert’s personal journey towards

⁴⁵ Within modern drama, there are many instances of non-linear scenes, or even non-linear works. In the case of Sondheim alone, *Company* is a non-linear musical that focuses on a character’s personal journey. *Merrily We Roll Along* takes place in a backwards chronology. *Passion* features a flashback, which takes place outside of the time chronology of the narrative. Despite this, all of these events—from a cumulative illumination of a person’s feelings, to a retrospective understanding of how someone became who they are, to an understanding of past events that shaped someone—

accepting a lasting relationship, rather than a particular, chronological series of events. The exposition and rising action are blurred together even more, as the audience comes to know the characters at different times throughout the show. However, it makes sense to discern the end of the exposition as the end of “Company,” since almost all the characters are introduced. Despite the unknown chronology, since the audience is learning more about Robert and his relationships, the rising action takes place in a relatively steady ascent through the rest of the act. The first act ends with a less than complete sense of resolution—hence the faded “R” on the graph in figure 1-7—with his solo, “Marry Me a Little,” where he says he is ready for marriage.⁴⁶

Contrary to his claims, the lyrics in table 1-4 tell the audience that he is not really ready for marriage, because he still cannot make a full commitment. There are little caveats throughout the lyric in which it is clear he does not understand that with commitment there is sacrifice. Musically, this incomplete dramatic resolution is reflected in the ending of the song where he sings “I’m ready.” The melody encompasses $\hat{5}-\hat{4}-\hat{3}$, ending the song on an imperfect authentic cadence (see mm. 182-186).

Because it is not linear, the already weakened sense of expositional return is underdetermined even more so, resulting in a faded “E” in the second act. The dramatic rising action in the second act encompasses all of the other songs until it reaches climax

contribute to a forward dramatic progression, and ultimately fall along the forward progression of the Freytag triangle.

⁴⁶ “Marry Me a Little” was cut from the original production of *Company*, but is commonly re-inserted into revivals of the show. Perhaps this cut in the original led to a unfulfilled sense of dramatic resolution because of the necessary dramatic fulfillment of this number with “Being Alive.”

at “Being Alive.” This number essentially completes the incomplete dramatic resolution in “Marry Me a Little.” Robert is truly ready for commitment at this point, as is reflected dramatically in his understanding of the sacrifices required. Because the drama is tied so tightly to the music, “Being Alive” can also function as a musical “resolution” of the incomplete ending of “Marry Me a Little.” Musically, “Being Alive” ends with a $\hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$ descent to a perfect authentic cadence. The incomplete $\hat{5}-\hat{4}-\hat{3}$ is projected to the end, reflecting the dramatic accumulation, and the musico-dramatic resolution completes the background of the entire show.

There is falling action and resolution in the dialogue after “Being Alive,” but the musical numbers 20 (“After Being Alive”) and 21 (“Finale Ultmato”) are often cut, accounting for their being in parentheses in figure 1-7. There is a huge musical resolution at the end of “Being Alive,” and musically it feels like the show can end there. The dialogue is a true falling action, and the ensemble has a sense of disappointed resolution in Robert not showing up to his birthday party, because he has resolved to stop depending on his friends to take the place of a wife.⁴⁷

The use of dialogue and the stretching of form in “Being Alive” into a musical scene was an important step for Sondheim in finding his musico-dramatic voice. His approach to the musical scene evolved more and more until it reached its pinnacle in *Passion*.

⁴⁷ It is rather atypical for a musical to end on a scene of dialogue. Precedence is set for this in Leonard Bernstein’s *West Side Story*, where the climax at Tony’s death scene is not musicalized.

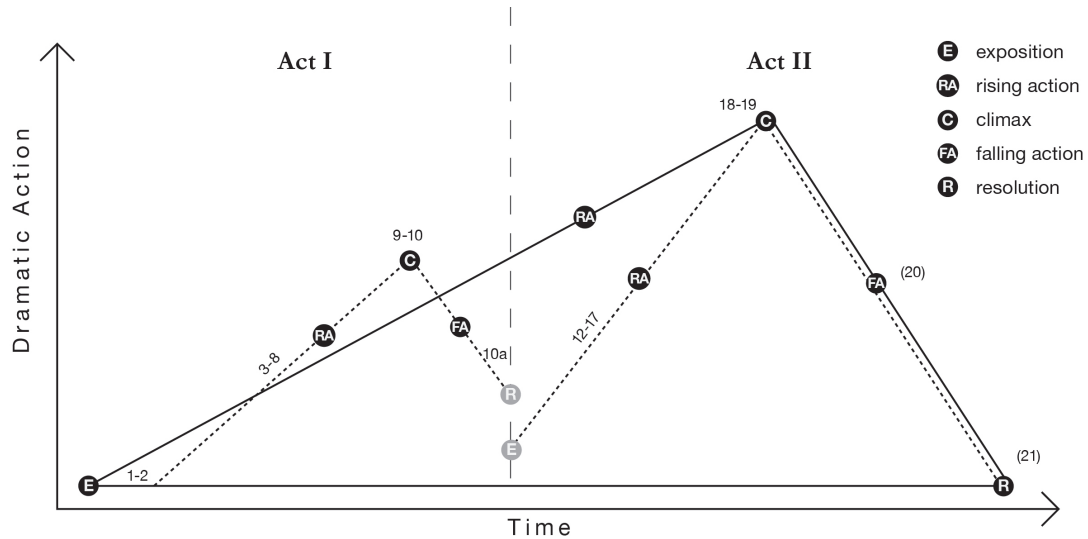


Figure 1-7. *Company* as a whole, where the Arabic numbers represent the musical numbers listed in the score.

Sweeney Todd

Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street derives from the 1973 play of the same name by Christopher Bond, itself being an adaptation of a story that originally traces back to mid-nineteenth-century England. The story takes place in Victorian London, and deals with Benjamin Barker, who was unjustly exiled to Australia because of a corrupt Judge's lust for his wife, Lucy. Barker returns to London some years later thanks to the sailor Anthony under the new moniker Sweeney Todd, and vows revenge on the Judge and his Beadle. After being propositioned by an old Beggar Woman, Todd sets up a barbershop in his old home. The residence is above the failing meat pie shop of Mrs. Lovett, who befriends Todd and tells him his wife took poison after the Judge raped her, and that the Judge took Barker's daughter, Johanna, as his ward. After a failed attempt on the Judge's life, Todd vows to kill every one of his customers until he is able to have his revenge. Ever the enterprising woman, Mrs. Lovett comes up with the idea of

using the killed customers as filling for her pies. Her business booms and she attempts to convince Todd to settle down with her. Todd, however, is bent on revenge. Meanwhile Anthony has fallen in love with Johanna and fails in his attempts to free her from the Judge. Todd makes a plan to use Anthony to bring Johanna to him, and then lure the Judge to his shop. His plan succeeds, but is interrupted by both the Beggar Woman, whom he kills, and the disguised Johanna, whom he nearly kills. After killing the Judge, he finds Mrs. Lovett in the bake house trying to dispose of the Beggar Woman's remains. Todd tries to help her and sees that the Beggar Woman is really his wife, Lucy. In his grief, he shoves Mrs. Lovett into the oven and laments over his murdered wife, only then to have his own throat slit by Toby, Mrs. Lovett's boy helper. This melodramatic plot lends itself well to multiple opportunities of extremes in musico-dramatic intensity.

By the time *Sweeney Todd* was premiered in 1979, Sondheim had entered into his mature compositional period. Even though Sondheim claims he had found his voice in *Company*, it took *Follies*, *A Little Night Music*, *The Frogs*, and *Pacific Overtures* for him to develop his musico-dramatic voice into the form for which he is most recognized, in which he uses extensive and numerous musical scenes.

Until Sondheim, most musicals were a collection of songs, more or less. Until Sondheim, most musicals involved a narrative in which songs were interpolated to help tell the story. Even Rodgers and Hammerstein, who were credited for "integrating" music and drama in musical comedies, followed a similar format. Especially true of most musical comedy soundtracks for shows before the 1940s, most of the songs can easily be considered as stand-alone pieces of music. There is little tying them together except the

overall plot of the show and some reprises and before Rodgers and Hammerstein even that was not always present.

Sondheim never went as far as Richard Wagner, with completely scored dramas and unending melodies, but he did take the idea of musical scene that was used in *Anyone Can Whistle* and *Company* and expand on it. In *Company*, the musical scenes generally involve one song. Examples like “The Little Things You Do Together,” “Another Hundred People,” and even to a small extent “Being Alive” are fairly traditional song forms that are broken up by sections of dialogue, which may or may not be underscored.

In *Sweeney Todd* a musical scene is not limited to one song encompassing dialogue; rather it is typically more than one song combined with sections of dialogue with underscored music. The songs are often taken out of context for performance in recitals and such, and can be considered as stand-alone numbers in some cases. Yet, they were conceived of and originally performed in the context of the musical in these larger groups, in an actual dramatic scene.

An example of an extended musical scene comes from early in the rising action of the show as a whole, demonstrating how a musical scene may encounter the different levels of the Freytag triangle without ultimately going very far up the rising action line. The musical scene begins with Johanna’s solo “Green Finch and Linnet Bird.” The form of this song is a rondo, in that the A statement, “Green finch and linnet bird, nightingale, blackbird, how is it you sing?,” opens the song, is repeated at m. 21, then repeated with

the lyric variation “*teach* me how to sing” at m. 55.⁴⁸ The repeating A is contrasted by different material each time, which always comes around again to a restatement of A.

The musico-dramatic intensity is directly related to the formal construction of the song. There is a mini-triangle in mm. 1-10, encompassing A (mm. 1-8) and B (mm. 9-20). The dramatic intensity rises as Johanna asks new questions to the birds, with each one reflecting her own imprisonment under Judge Turpin.⁴⁹ The climax of the questioning comes at “How can you remain, staring at the rain, maddened by the stars?” After this climax, there is falling action as her initial question “How is it you sing” is repeated twice, repeating the original melodic material, but over an E \flat pedal.

The music reflects this growth and release of intensity. The first phrase begins with tonic on C5 over an F bass. In the second question (mm. 5-8), there is a harmonic change of both root (D) and color (minor), ending on E5 over an A bass. At m. 9 there is a bit of a lull with the B section, although it is higher in the singer’s tessitura, which then builds higher and higher to the phrase’s musical climax at m. 15—a G5 over an E \flat (subtonic). This coincides directly with the word “stars,” being the climax of the lyric in this section. The bass then stays on E \flat , with little harmonic change, and “how is it you sing” is a repeated motive from the beginning. A *ritardando* also brings the level of intensity down just before the A section returns at m. 21. A sequential statement enters in mm. 25-26, and ends with another brief lull in mm. 31-33 that is similar to mm. 17-20.

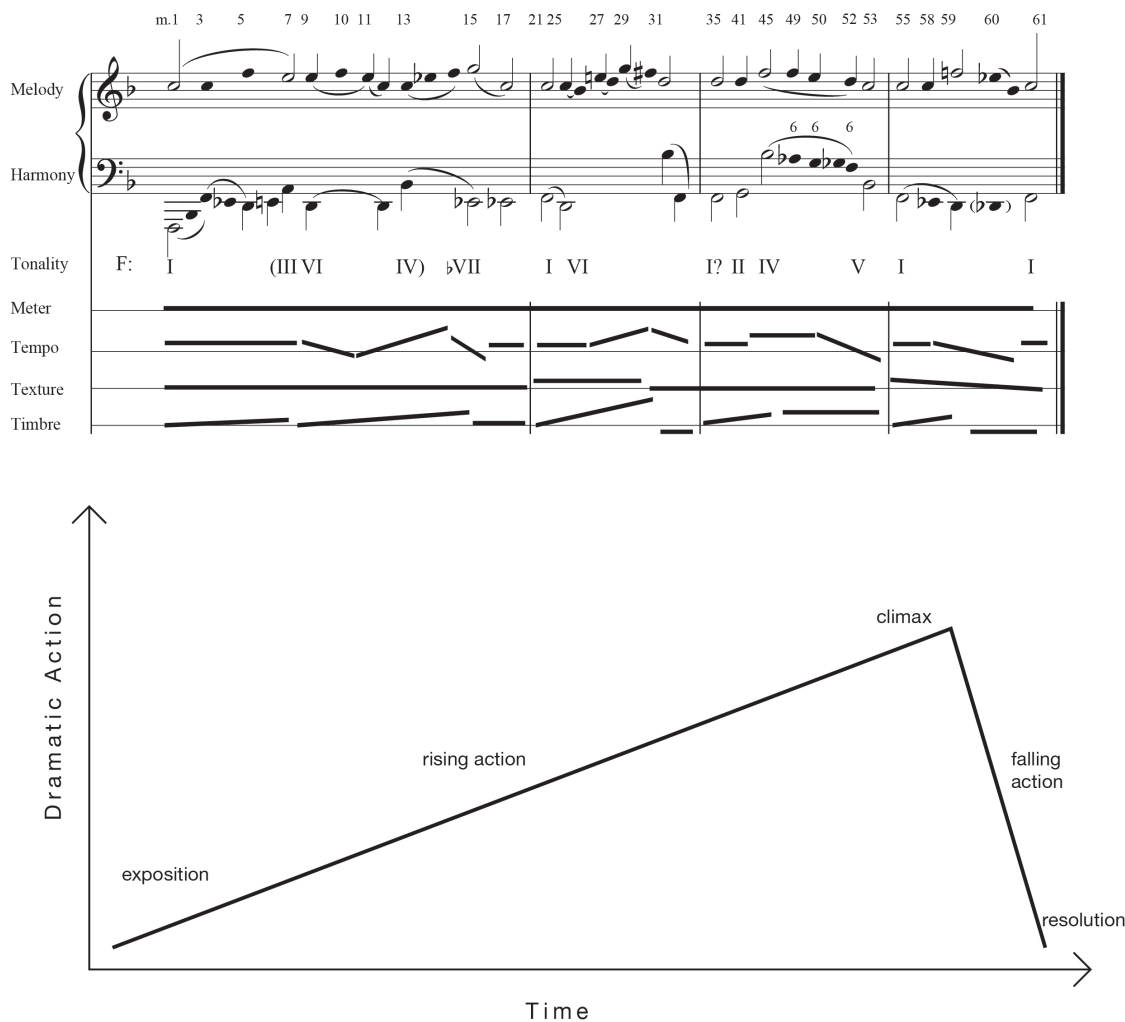
⁴⁸ This change in lyric is important and will be discussed later.

⁴⁹ One may not understand the true significance of this metaphor until later on in the show, and may have difficulty in understanding the text the first time through because of the placement of the song in such a high soprano tessitura.

However, rather than coming back in with the same text in mm. 37-39, there is new text and the melody begins on D5 instead of C5, still over the F pedal, causing an increase in musical intensity because of the change from what is expected in both melody and lyrics.

From there the line continues through until m. 54, with a cadenza-like trill on C5 on the vocalized, sighing-syllable “ah.” This brings back another statement of A, which is quite short, and moves to the climax on the phrase “if I cannot fly,” with fly on an F5. As the musico-dramatic resolution was not the highest pitch in “Being Alive,” the dramatic climax carries significant weight in how the musical climax is perceived in “Green Finch and Linnet Bird” as well. Although the F5 is not the highest note in the piece, it becomes the climax by being paired with the dramatic climax. Johanna realizes she cannot leave, and with that realization, the falling action occurs, matched by the use of a Mixolydian melody and an incomplete resolution on C5 with “let me sing.” Ultimately, both dramatically and musically, she is back where she started. The lack of perfect authentic cadence is telling, since both the character and the musical scene are incomplete. Additionally, the modal cadence and the continuous accompaniment employs a *segue* into the next scene that contributes to the incomplete feeling of the music and drama.

The song essentially ends over a tonic F at m. 61, but in the score the singer holds the C into the next measure over a B \flat , and the score gives a *segue* indication so that the music keeps the dramatic scene going. B \flat then becomes the pivot from F, where it is subdominant, to E \flat , where it is dominant. Figure 1-8 graphs the musico-dramatic intensity analysis for the song.



**Figure 1-8. Musico-dramatic intensity analysis of
“Green Finch and Linnet Bird,” from *Sweeney Todd*.**

Anthony’s number, “Ah, Miss,” is introduced with the accompaniment from “Green Finch and Linnet Bird” and the melody from “No Place Like London” in mm. 1-3. The new song begins in mm. 12-13, although this material is interrupted by “No Place Like London” material again in mm. 21-24. At m. 33, Johanna sings melodic fragments from “Green Finch and Linnet Bird” in counterpoint with Anthony’s lyrics

until their eyes meet for the first time. At this point, dramatically, Johanna has been introduced and Anthony sees her for the first time. He then sings of his excitement at beholding her and his desire for her to look at him, until she finally does. His excitement is matched in the eclectic musical fragments and the lack of proper song.⁵⁰ After this, the fated couple are interrupted by the entrance of the Beggar Woman and her “Alms, alms!” motif at m. 41. This leads to an underscored scene of dialogue between her and Anthony, in which she tells him Johanna’s name and that she is the Judge’s ward.

After another lewd proposition in the form of a sailor song in B \flat , Anthony chases off the Beggar Woman. The B \flat becomes the dominant as the underscoring leads into “Johanna (Part 1),” in E \flat . Because of the constant interruptions of a regular song form and lack of new materials, “Ah, Miss” and the dialogue after it essentially function as an extension of underscoring, and work as musico-dramatic glue that holds the scene together.

Anthony tells of his desire to be with Johanna in the song that shares her name. It would seem, as this song begins, that it will be a complete proper song and end the scene. Having two proper songs as well as underscored dialogue and fragmented themes would seem to be enough of a unified thread for Sondheim to get his point across. However, the scene does not end there because the song is interrupted after m. 24. The interruption is a partially underscored scene with the repeated mm. 25-26, in which the Judge and Beadle

⁵⁰ Proper songs are defined as musical numbers in which accompanied vocal melody regularly occurs in a more or less standard song form. This is opposed to scenes of monologue or dialogue that are put to music, much in a recitative-like manner.

return, find Anthony attempting to give Johanna a present, beat him and throw him on the street with a warning not to see her again.

After this, Anthony sings “Johanna (Part 2)” in which he resolves to take her to be with him. The music is mostly the same as part one, except for some changes in mm. 31-40. However, the dramatic context along with these minor musical changes creates a huge increase in musico-dramatic intensity. The melody ends with an imperfect authentic cadence on $\hat{5}$ in m. 34, mirroring Johanna’s imperfect authentic cadence in m. 61 of “Green Finch and Linnet Bird” and uniting the characters musically and dramatically.⁵¹ The musico-dramatic intensity analysis for “Johanna” appears in figure 1-9.

“Johanna” has a literal interruption, since the Judge and Beadle divert the song and the drama. Despite this, it is held together as the music is repeated in the instrumental underscore. Part two keeps the same ABA form of part one, but with new lyrics, which increase the intensity. The next time the A section enters with “I feel you, Johanna,” it has a new meaning. Anthony has decided what he will do and is determined to do it; it is no longer a fantasy as it was when he sang “Ah, Miss.” The music is still incomplete, but so is Anthony’s mission. The lyric line “and one day, I’ll steal you” is the musico-dramatic climax. There is a resolution to do something about his situation: “‘Till I’m with you then, I’m with you there, sweetly buried in your yellow hair,” but it is just one resolution along a continuous rising action in the first act, and ultimately the entire musical.

⁵¹ The orchestra ends the number on $\hat{3}$ after Anthony has finished singing, but the vocal melody is more important to musico-dramatic structure, so $\hat{5}$ is considered the final melodic pitch.

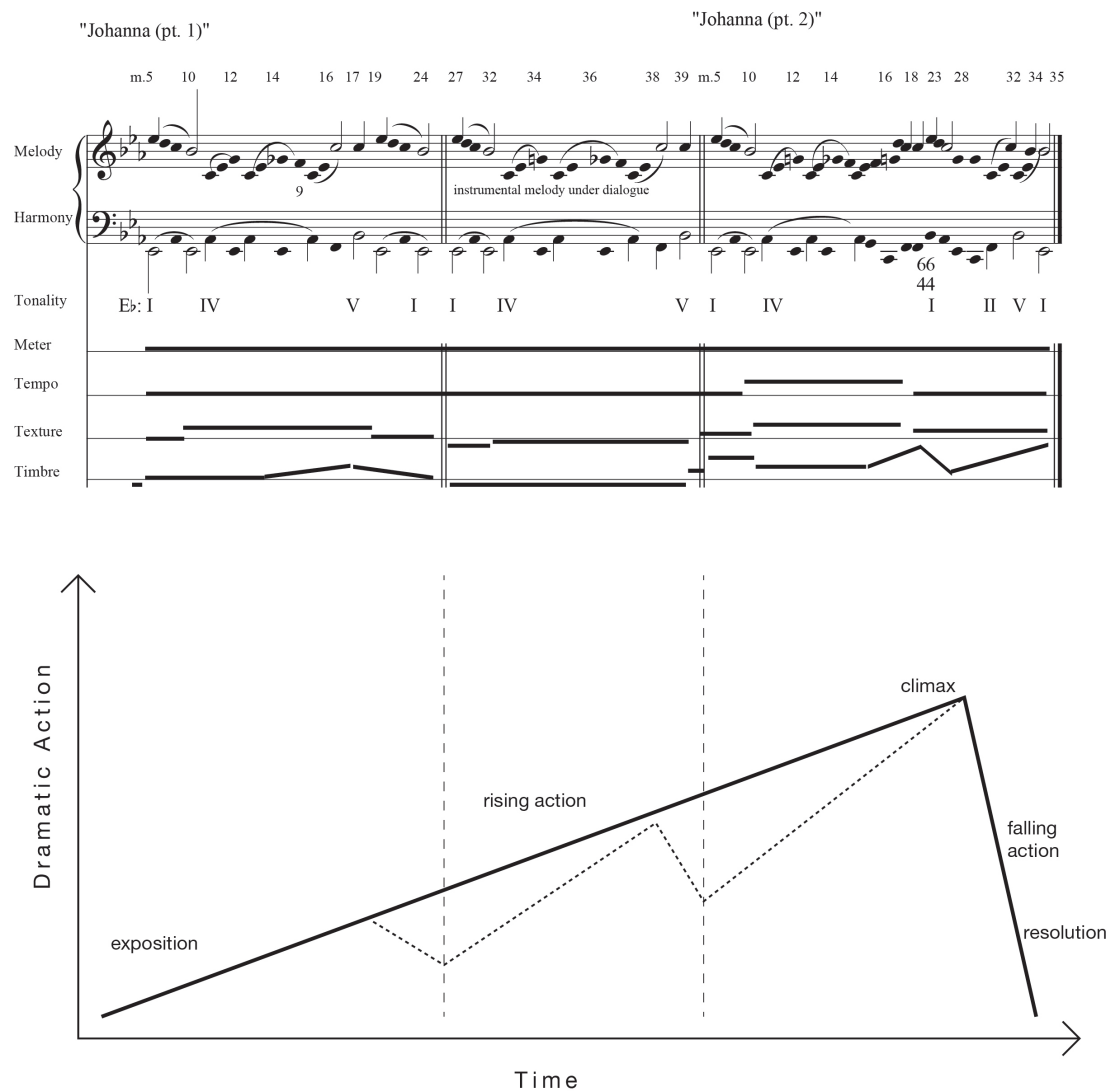
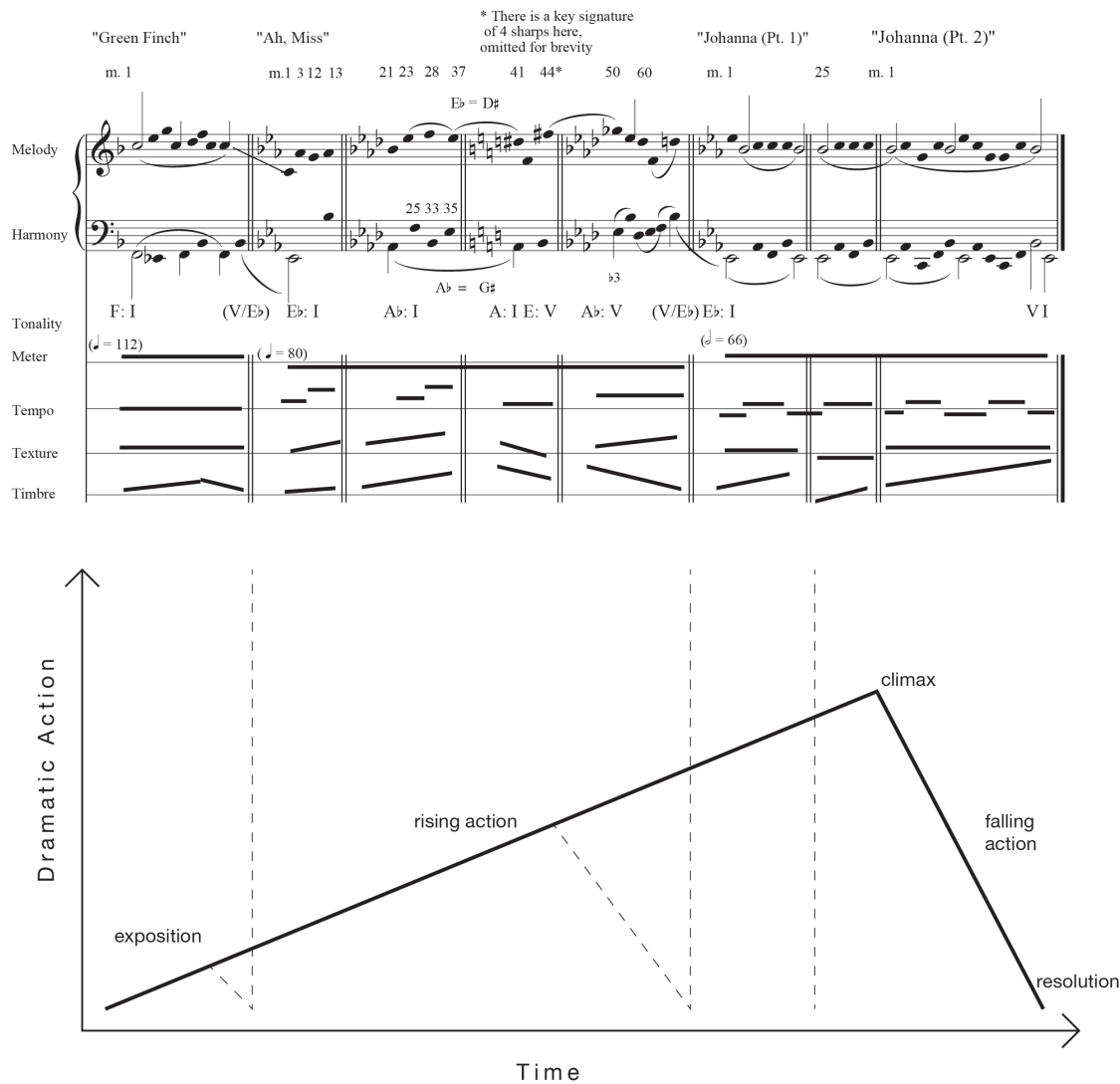


Figure 1-9. Musico-dramatic intensity analysis of “Johanna,” from *Sweeney Todd*.

Both “Green Finch and Linnet Bird” and “Johanna” are often listened to and performed as separate, proper songs out of the context of the show and with changes from the written score. However, the context within a musical scene shows the true Sondheim musico-dramatic voice. The pieces work as complete songs in their own right, but the way in which a *segue* leads one into the other—along with the addition of “Ah, Miss”

and the dialogue that add dramatic intensity—make this distinctly Sondheim. The musico-dramatic intensity analysis in figure 1-10 demonstrates how these pieces work together as a large musical scene.



**Figure 1-10. Musico-dramatic intensity analysis of
“Green Finch and Linnet Bird,” “Ah, Miss,” and “Johanna.”**

The show works together in traditional dramatic form for the two acts. The first act ends with Todd missing his chance to kill the Judge and deciding that he is going to kill everyone who comes to his shop until he gets his revenge. Mrs. Lovett suggests the idea of using the people to make pies, and they end on “A Little Priest,” a grotesquely humorous song about what they plan to do. There is a resolution of what to do, but ultimately the incomplete resolution of the drama is reflected in the musico-dramatic intensity analysis as not falling as far toward resolution, thus the location and fade of the “R” in figure 1-11.

The second act opens with the now successful pie shop, moving eventually to Judge Turpin’s return and the tragic ending. The tying factor for the climax of both acts is the song “Pretty Women.” In both cases, Sweeney has the Turpin in his chair, ready to give the killing slice. In the first act, he misses his chance and the intensity remains through “Epiphany.” In the second act he gets his chance, and the audience may think that since he has had his revenge, that mm. 51-55 is the climax.

However, the ultimate climax actually proves to be where Sweeney kills Lucy, which happens at mm. B-4 of “Final Scene” just before he dispatches the Judge. Sondheim gives musical clues to this throughout the musical. In mm. 72-73 of “Epiphany,” Sweeney sings the line “and my Lucy lies in ashes,” which uses the same melodic motive. The motive returns when Todd kills Lucy/the Beggar Woman in the second staff of mm. 6-7 of “The Judge’s Return.” The entrance of the Judge at m. 8 interrupts this climax, creating a mini-climax within a span of the “true” climax. The music and drama climax again when Judge Turpin dies, but the true climax is extended

and not finished until Sweeney discovers that he killed Lucy and then turns on Mrs. Lovett for tricking him. In this case, the climax has its own sense of interruption with a false resolution in mm. 58-59 of “The Judge’s Return,” where Sweeney sings, “Rest now, my friend.” The musico-dramatic triangle takes a number of descents on the ultimate rise during a very long climax.

Sweeney is driven mad by his lust for revenge and the thought that his wife had died, which is reflected musically and dramatically in “Epiphany” and “A Little Priest.” His madness takes its toll on him, to where he blindly destroys the wife he thought he lost, which is the ultimate tragedy of the musical.

The musical scene that encompasses “Green Finch and Linnet Bird,” “Ah Miss,” and “Johanna” work together to form a minor ascent along the long range rising action for all of *Sweeney Todd*. Sondheim’s musical choices reflect the smaller conflicts of the subplot. The smaller conflicts are writ large across the entire show, becoming a foreground projection of the overall dramatic form within the complete, individual songs and across the musical as a whole.

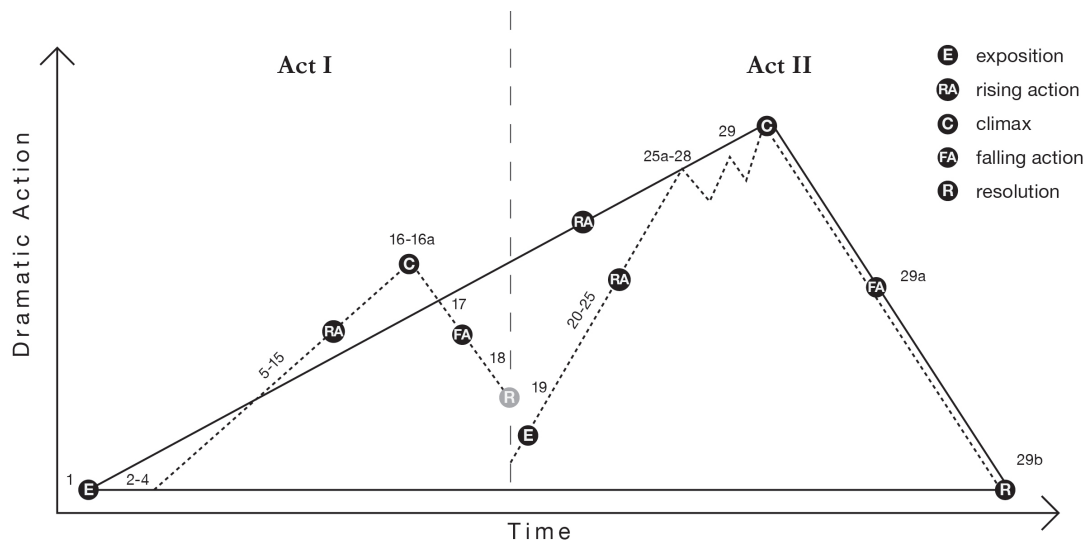


Figure 1-11. *Sweeney Todd* as a whole.

Sunday in the Park with George

Sunday in the Park with George shows Sondheim's desire to explore something new in terms of musico-dramatic form. When first approaching the concept of this musical, he thought of using theme and variations as the overall form of the piece.

Michiko Kakatuni writes that Sondheim

hoped, with *Sunday* to realize an old, unfulfilled ambition—to translate the musical form of 'theme and variation' to the stage. [quotes Sondheim] 'Every time I listen to Rachmaninoff's variations on Paganini, I'm stunned,' he says, 'and I thought it would be a lot of fun to try theatrically. When we'd fastened on the idea of using Seurat's painting and showing how it was made for the first act, I was all excited because I thought the second act could be a series of variations or comments on the painting.' The second act, he speculated, might take a revue-like form, in which songs about different aspects of art would be addressed to the audience. Or, it might deal with a series of variations performed on Seurat's painting itself.⁵²

Sondheim later abandoned the idea. However, the musical did turn out to be a theme with one variation.

⁵² Kakutani, "How Two Artists Shaped an Innovative Musical," 27.

The first act of the show follows the fantasized life of real-life nineteenth-century French artist Georges Seurat. It begins with Georges drawing a sketch of his mistress Dot on the Isle of La Grande Jatte sometime between 1884-1886. The act explores the breakdown of their relationship because of George's inability to connect with people and his ever-consuming focus on his art. Dot leaves him and takes their newborn child to follow Louis the baker to America. Georges finishes his famous painting on which the show is based, and the characters of the painting, whom the audience has met along the way, come together to recreate the painting on stage. The first act could be considered a complete show by itself. Unlike most pieces of theater, the first act finale, "Sunday," does provide a resolution. Although Dot has left Georges, resolution has come in that he has finished his painting and has left a legacy in both his art and his unborn child.

The second act mirrors the first in a number of ways. The same actors from the first act are used to play characters from the second act, with many of the characters being very similar to their counterparts, though now set in modern times (the 1980s). The actor who played Georges now plays Seurat's great grandson, George. Dot doubles as George's grandmother, Marie, who is the child of Seurat's whom Dot was carrying. This George also has a hard time connecting, although not so much with people as with finding meaning in his art.⁵³ It is not until he takes a trip to the Isle of La Grande Jatte, where he encounters Dot, that he finds what he is looking for. The notes of a grammar

⁵³ The musical scene in *Sunday in the Park with George* that delves into George's struggle is "Putting it Together," a seventeen part musical extravaganza that takes an entire scene to allow one "song" to be completed. This song is not analyzed in more detail here because Steve Swayne has worked extensively with it in Swayne, *How Sondheim Found His Sound*, 197-256.

book that Dot wrote concerning Georges's artistic aesthetic inspire the modern George to connect to his past and find meaning in his art.

Sondheim uses musical and dramatic motives throughout the first act that are paralleled in the second act, which hold the form of the show together. The second act also ends with a reprise of "Sunday," but the ways in which Sondheim approaches this ending and the manner in which it is altered to become more of a reflective musical scene allow it to bring not only balance, but a firmer resolution to the show as a whole. As discussed previously, a typical musical might end the first act on a dramatic climax, which needs to be resolved in the second act. *Sunday in the Park with George* is not unlike a musical theme and variations, in which the initial theme, although closed, is reopened for a new interpretation. The second act ends with a conflict and resolution that is tied into the events of the first act, making it more intense and allowing the general shape of the Freytag triangle to still permeate the entire show.

The two versions of the song "Sunday" have only a few, minor differences in terms of musical content. The reprise is shortened a little at the beginning, with fewer iterations of the opening motive. One of the initial verses is cut and so m. 27 elides into m. 37.⁵⁴ The reprise also eliminates the bottom staff of the ensemble from mm. 22-46, which in most cases does not affect the sound much because of doublings. However, Sondheim cut out the lowest vocal line in mm. 42-44, eliminating a bit of the richness of the chord, although the line is mostly doubled in the highest voice. One other slight change at m. 46 is where the ensemble sings the word "water" in harmony with the

⁵⁴ Interestingly, the score labels the reprise's measures to almost exactly match the initial "Sunday." The cuts are just simply left out and measures are skipped, like in this case where it goes from m. 27 directly to m. 37.

melody line. George's little motive in mm. 58-59 is also cut. The final change is the ending cadence. In the first act, m. 73 the opening motive arrives on beat two, so that the dissonant counterpoint line begins on beat three and is heard in regular time. A relatively simple G major triad finishes the cadence after the "Sunday" motive. In the second act, the opening motive enters on beat four, with the dissonant counterpoint line beginning on beat one and with a different rhythm, but with fermatas. The final chord is more registrally spaced out and is thicker than the first act closing, giving a firmer finality to the chord.

Apart from these minor differences, there is not much of a difference musically between the closing numbers of both acts. However, the second act's ending is perceived as a stronger musico-dramatic resolution because of what is happening dramatically. In the first act "Sunday," Georges speaks about his artistic aesthetic over iterations of the opening motive as he starts to place the subjects of the painting into place. When he ends with the word "harmony," the regular accompaniment pattern enters at m. 20 and the ensemble sings the finale together as they finish moving into their places, directed by Georges. It is essentially a complete, proper song without any interruption from dialogue.

In the second act version, modern George is reading Seurat's words—the same words from the first act "Sunday"—from Dot's grammar book while the regular accompaniment pattern is playing. The ensemble enters to sing "Sunday" at m. 24a, but this time to and with George, rather than as subjects of his painting.⁵⁵ It therefore becomes more of a musical scene with George's dialogue happening over the song, especially at the beginning and end at mm. 73-76.

⁵⁵ Again, there are cuts and new numberings that affect the measure numbers of this example

The dramatic elements that accumulate intensity before they are discharged in these songs are also important. Both are preceded by similar numbers: the first act “Sunday” with “We Do Not Belong Together” and the second act “Sunday” with “Move On,” the local climaxes for each act. In the first act, Dot leaves Georges and tells them they do not belong together, though they *should have* belonged together. The first act may be perceived to have more unresolved dramatic intensity in its climax than the second act, because the characters of Georges and Dot cannot reconcile. Their inability to reconcile provides a dramatic link and further accumulation of intensity to “Move On” in the second act, which is essentially the completion and resolution of its first act counterpart. In the second act, Dot now tells George that they have always belonged together, and his connection with his past brings them this unity. Sondheim even talks about how “Move On” compiles all of the themes of the show into that one song, which completes the show musically and dramatically.⁵⁶

Dot sings “We do not belong together...we *should* have belonged together.” This allows for a reconciliation in the second act, which ultimately makes the resolution in the second act more fulfilling, in that it resolves the conflicts of both the first and second acts. Because of the reconciliation of Georges and Dot through the modern George’s ability to connect to his past, his art and to people, the ending of the second act is a more complete resolution of the entire musical. In this way, the musico-dramatic structure is complete.

The typical experience of dramatic interruption at the end of the first act is not present in *Sunday in the Park with George*. There is resolution, although slightly tragic,

⁵⁶ Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 93.

when Dot leaves Georges to go to America. The reconciliation of the two through the modern George in the second act brings a more final closure in the piece, showing that even with a theme and variation-like form, the show retains the notion of accumulating conflict and ultimately releasing it in the end.

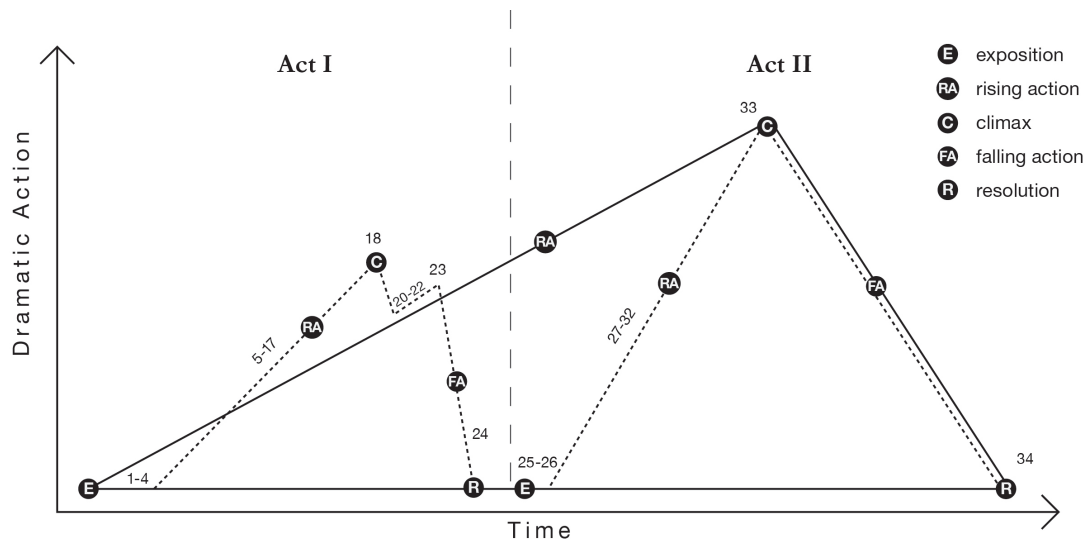


Figure 1-12. *Sunday in the Park with George* as a whole.

Into the Woods

Into the Woods is built on the connection of several familiar fairy tales—Cinderella, Jack and the Beanstalk, Little Red Riding Hood, and Rapunzel—as well as the addition of a new story about a Baker, the Baker’s Wife and a Witch. The characters and their stories are interconnected, with the first act ending as the audience expects in the typical “happily ever after” of fairy tales. The second act presents what happens after this, where the consequences of the characters’s decisions lead to conflict and death, but ultimately a coming together as a community.

Sondheim’s use of the musical scene grows in *Into the Woods*. The entire opening to the first act—which is similarly dealt with in the second act—is one large musical

scene composed of nine parts and several unique “ditties,” as Sondheim calls them.⁵⁷ It traverses a grand exposition of sixty-three pages in the score and on the video recording lasts over fifteen minutes before moving the story along. Sondheim introduces a number of different characters and stories that are ultimately interconnected. This musical scene is different in that it encompasses several different scenes at times successively and at times simultaneously. Because of this, there are moments along the Freytag triangle for each character or group that happen at different times.

Part one of the opening begins with a micro-exposition within this larger exposition. The most prominent of the main characters—Cinderella, Jack, the Baker and the Baker’s Wife—are introduced by the spoken dialogue of the Narrator. Each character expresses their desires that propel the entire musical. They all begin with the motive “I wish,” on an ascending, tonally unresolved major second.

Within part one, there are several subdivisions, with the next occurring at m. 24 when Cinderella’s stepsisters are introduced. Jack’s mother enters at the next subdivision at m. 39 and Little Red Riding Hood comes in at m. 59. Essentially, the first subdivision encompasses the main characters simultaneously, and then the rest of the introductions are more successive and focused within a particular character’s vignette. The rest of part one continues to develop the scenes with rising action, taking turns through each scene.

⁵⁷ Sondheim’s use of the term “ditty” is very much like a *leitmotif*. However, he seems to use *leitmotif* more for complete themes that are unchanged, whereas a ditty is something that may be developed, expanded or fragmented a lot more freely. See Nina Mankin, “The PAJ Casebook #2: ‘Into the Woods,’” *Performing Arts Journal* 11, no. 1 (1988): 46-66.

The music in this part begins with fragmented motives and grows into more concrete phrases.

Part two returns to Little Red's interaction with the Baker and his Wife. She sings the first iteration of the nursery rhyme-like "Into the Woods" ditty, which ends at m. 34 with the first sense of both dramatic and musical closure.⁵⁸ However, the *segue* allows the E \flat tonic bass at the cadence to continue as a pedal in the next scene.

Part three returns to Cinderella and her stepsisters with material that is more melodically developed than in part one. Cinderella's ditty is interspersed with rhythmic dialogue and babbling from the stepsisters, as in mm. 25-26, and ends with spoken dialogue before a *segue* brings it into the next scene.

Part four begins with underscored dialogue from the Narrator, Baker, Baker's Wife and the Witch for twenty-three measures. In m. 24, the Witch begins her "rap," propelling along the rising action of the musical-scene, which finishes the section.

Another *segue* leads to more underscored dialogue between Jack and his mother for part five, which establishes Jack's conflict in needing to sell his best friend, his cow, so they can afford to eat. Jack's Mother then begins a more or less complete ditty at m. 12, which leads to the "Into the Woods" melody again at m. 30, and completing their part of the expository number.

More dialogue occurs over the *segue* into part six. This part is only two pages long, and is simply the Witch speaking—in notated rhythm—over mostly sustained notes

⁵⁸ In the video recording, this is the audience's first opportunity to applaud, despite the segue indicated in the score. Fifteen minutes is a very long time for an audience to go without a single break in the action, so the director may have chosen to slow down the segue and use a blackout to allow the audience a break.

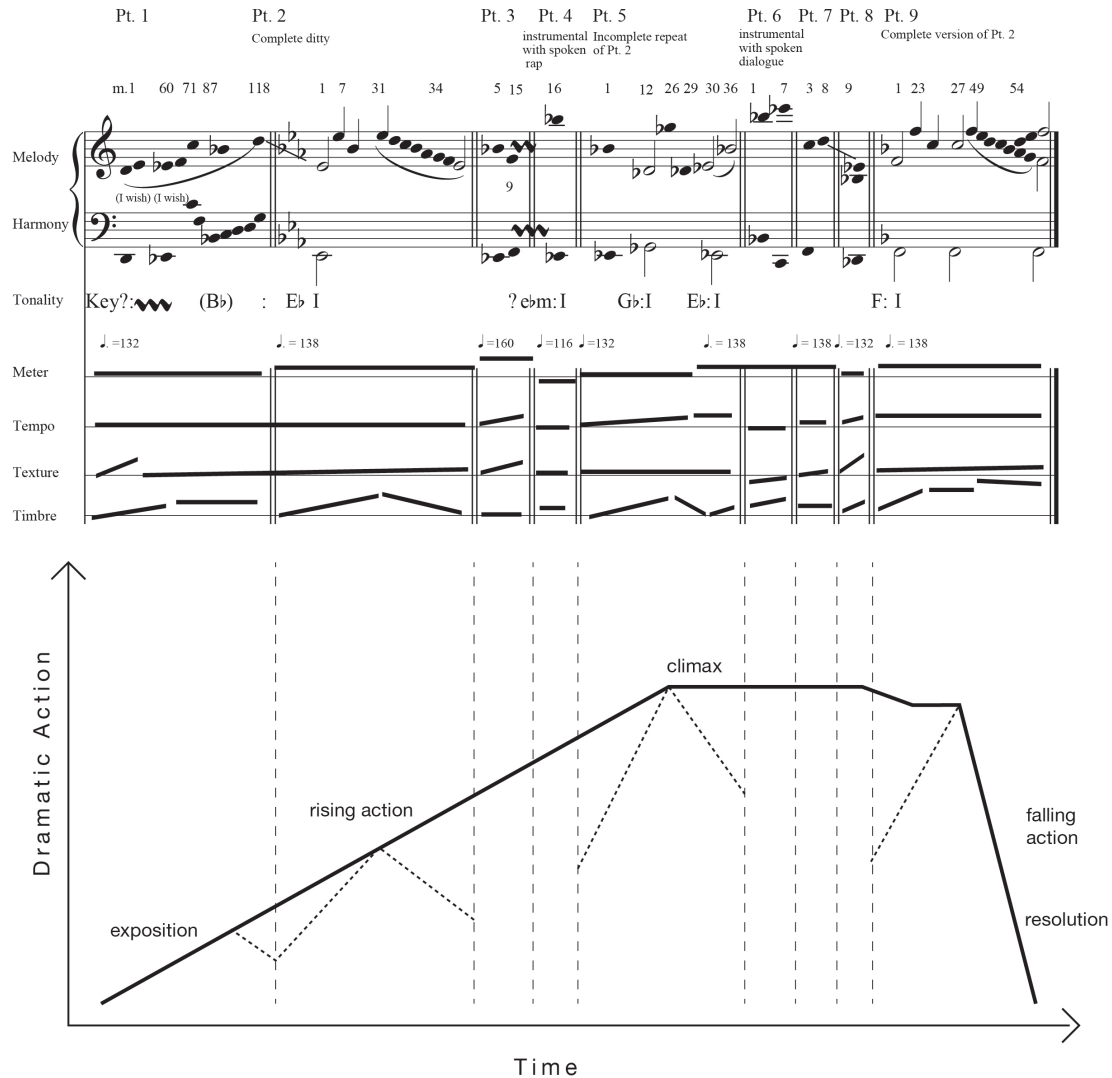
in the accompaniment. This, however, is the micro-climax for the scene between the Witch, the Baker and the Baker's Wife.

Cinderella's micro-climax comes in part seven, mm. 7-10, where her family leaves for the festival without her. This scene is musically made up mostly of motivic fragments. The fragments increase musical intensity because of the sense of starting and stopping, which leads to a sense of incomplete melody, quicker rhythm and disrupted meter.

The climax from part six is carried over to part eight. The Baker has found the purportedly magic beans and decides to leave by himself to meet the Witch's demands. He and his wife argue over whether she should accompany him, and their music eventually begins to overlap with that of Cinderella, resolving to visit her mother's grave to ask to go the festival, increasing dramatic intensity. The musical intensity also increases, with the Baker and Cinderella singing their separate lines in counterpoint, as seen in mm. 28-29.

Part nine begins again with the "Into the Woods" ditty sung by the Baker and Cinderella. Jack, his mother and Little Red eventually join them. At m. 27 there is a new section within this song, increasing the musical intensity again as the characters attempt to encourage themselves in preparation for their coming journey. This increase in intensity comes from a formal change to something new and a textural change as the characters sing in unison. At m. 39 the entire company joins in the original ditty, finishing off with the characters journeying into the woods, the ultimate resolution of the

musical scene in mm. 53-54. Figure 1-13 shows how the nine parts work together as a musical scene in a musico-dramatic intensity analysis.



**Figure 1-13. Musico-dramatic intensity analysis of
“Act I Opening,” from *Into the Woods*.**

In the sense of the entire act, and the entire show, this huge musical scene is simply an exposition. The characters are now able to go into the woods and begin their separate journeys that will ultimately become intertwined. The scene acts as its own

micro-drama as well. The expository musical scene that is called “Act One Opening” is to this point the longest extended musical scene that Sondheim has written in any show. He uses it to introduce dramatic plot and subplot, characters, and musical themes that are developed and expanded on larger levels to create the musical as a whole.

The rest of the first act explores the various fairy tales as the brothers Grimm told them, but with new interconnections provided by book writer and director James Lapine. The connecting thread is the story of the Baker and the Baker’s Wife—a new tale created by Lapine and Sondheim—who retrieve an item from each of the characters so that they can make a potion to have a child. At the end of the first act, there is a true “fairy tale ending” in which all the characters get what they think they want. However, the narrator ends the final number, “Ever After,” with the ominous “to be continued...” just before the characters sing “and happy ever after” in mm. 111-113. Musically, there is a sense of closure and resolution, and the majority of the characters in the show dramatically think they are getting the same thing. The narrator’s line instills a hint of doubt and creates a lack of dramatic resolution, which ultimately may affect the audience’s sense of musical resolution, and so the drama colors the musical interpretation. Without the narrator’s line, *Into the Woods* could easily be a complete, one-act musical.

The second act begins similarly to the first with an extended musical scene as the exposition. However, the rising action and conflict that occur in this act dramatically and musically are at a much higher level of intensity than in the first act. The happily ever after that was supposed to be is usurped by the Giant’s destruction of much of the kingdom and several of the characters. The characters move from the ersatz fairy tale

conflicts to real-life tragedy, and must overcome them as a community rather than as individuals. They resolve to kill the Giant, and the Baker, Cinderella, Jack and Little Red decide to make a home together. The entire musical then works as a typical drama by way of an interrupted structure, since the Narrator's perturbation of complete resolution for the first act is followed by ultimate resolution in the second (see figure 1-14).

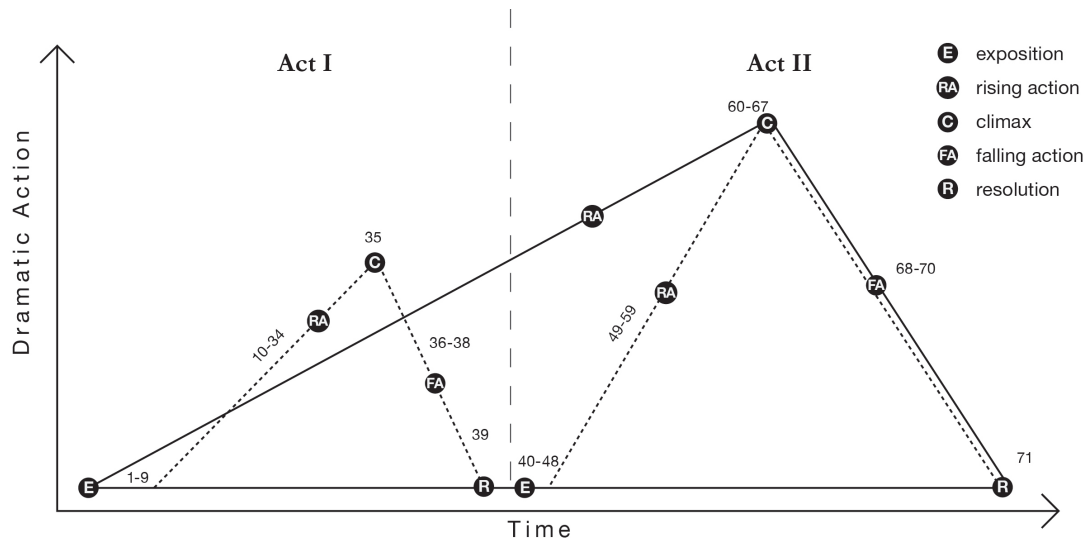


Figure 1-14. *Into the Woods* as a whole.

Passion

Passion is based on the film *Passione d'Amore* by Ettore Scola, which in turn derives from the novel *Fosca* by Iginio Ugo Tarchetti. The musical begins with an Italian army captain, Giorgio, who is having a love affair with a woman named Clara in Milan. Giorgio is transferred to a remote military base, where he meets the colonel's disturbed cousin, Fosca. Fosca initially revolts Giorgio, both physically and personally, which he relays to Clara through letters. Fosca's relentless attachment to Giorgio originally angers and disturbs him, but after Clara reveals that she is not willing to leave her husband to be with him, he comes to the realization that Fosca truly loves him as no one ever has. The

consummation of their relationship leads to her death, and he becomes as emotionally and physically fragile as she was.

If *Sweeney Todd* is where Sondheim's mature voice really presents itself, *Passion* is an example of where it has reached its peak. Even though there are a number of musical scenes that encompass multiple songs in *Sweeney Todd*, *Sunday in the Park with George* and *Into the Woods*, most of the songs can be separated rather easily in a recording and considered proper songs in their own right when some music or scenes are cut. The lines become a lot more blurred in *Passion*. Some songs are not even titled as such; they are simply within a larger scene.

Passion is a one-act musical.⁵⁹ Because of this, the effect of a very discernable interruption in the musico-dramatic intensity—the intermission—is missing. This means the show takes a singular, unbroken rising action to the climax. Many of the numbers and scenes elide into each other with a *segue*, and so the effect of musical scene is even more pervasive throughout this work.

Among the constant rising action is a musical scene entitled “Flashback,” which is made up of four parts in the score as four mini-scenes, much like the *Into the Woods* opening. A flashback acts very much as both exposition and rising action, in that it often gives the origin of an important plot point. The exposition part of it tells us where the situation evolved from, and the rising action shows how the conflicts of the past led to the present situation. In this case, we see what happened in Fosca's past that led to her

⁵⁹ The Music Theatre International score divides the show into two acts, just before the “Flashback” scene begins. However, the scene just before this indicates a segue into the “Flashback” scene.

present state of emotional and physical sickness, and it causes Giorgio to understand her situation and pity her, eventually leading him to succumb to her in the end.

Although there is no intermission, and the scene before this ends with a *segue*, “Flashback” does have some features of the beginning of a second act. The second act, often coming from the dramatic interruption, usually begins at a lower point in dramatic intensity and builds again to the ultimate climax. It often works as a quasi-exposition, although if one keeps the analogy to tonal harmony going, it would be more like starting the second phrase on the predominant, since the tonic-like exposition has already been established.

“Flashback” begins with its own narrated exposition. The Colonel and Fosca take turns narrating the events of her young adult life. There is dialogue interspersed with musical fragments; these are often motives from other parts of the score. At times the Colonel and Fosca sing in harmony or counterpoint, trading musical material in a call-and-response fashion, as seen in mm. 5-11.

The Colonel tells of how he met a Count Ludovic, who comes calling on Fosca and asks for her hand in marriage. The end of part one hints at the deception that Ludovic will ultimately display, as Fosca sings “I sensed in him a danger, deception, even violence,” over a minor dominant chord in mm. 95-97.

Part two increases the musical intensity through an elevated tempo. Dialogue continues over underscoring, revealing that after the marriage the “Count” made himself more and more scarce. At m. 4, a woman confronts Fosca, insisting that Ludovic is a

fraud, and that he has also used her. This is sung as the first mini-song within the musical scene and it acts as rising action toward the climax to come in the next part.

Fosca reveals through dialogue at the end of this part that she confronted Ludovic, and part three begins Ludovic's mini-song, again quickening the tempo. He freely admits that he deceived her and that he is not sorry for it. The accompaniment to this section changes to an almost sarcastic sounding waltz, reflecting the remorseless Ludovic's lyrics. The third part acts as the climax of the entire musical scene in mm. 40-43, with Ludovic leaving Fosca with the news that she is now in an even more dire financial condition than she thought, as he climaxes on G4, the climax of the entire musical scene.

Part four is much like part one, in that there is mostly dialogue interspersed with recitative-like lines, like in mm. 16-20. The intensity drops as this part works as falling action to the quasi-resolution at the end of the number. Here, the audience learns that Fosca's health failed and her parents died. The Colonel sings of how he was deceived and wishes to take revenge in his own mini-song, which leads to all the characters in the scene—minus Giorgio and Fosca—singing a sort of moral for the entire show: "Beauty is power, Longing a disease," in mm. 88-91.

The voices end on an A \flat tonic triad, giving even the sense of quasi-resolution, except that it is in a very unstable second inversion when considered with the bass line. Also contributing to an incomplete feeling of resolution is that the overall musical-scene is still part of the dramatic rising action. This scene also features a musical and dramatic *segue* into the next, not allowing for much of a sense of resolution as it continues the story and the music along.

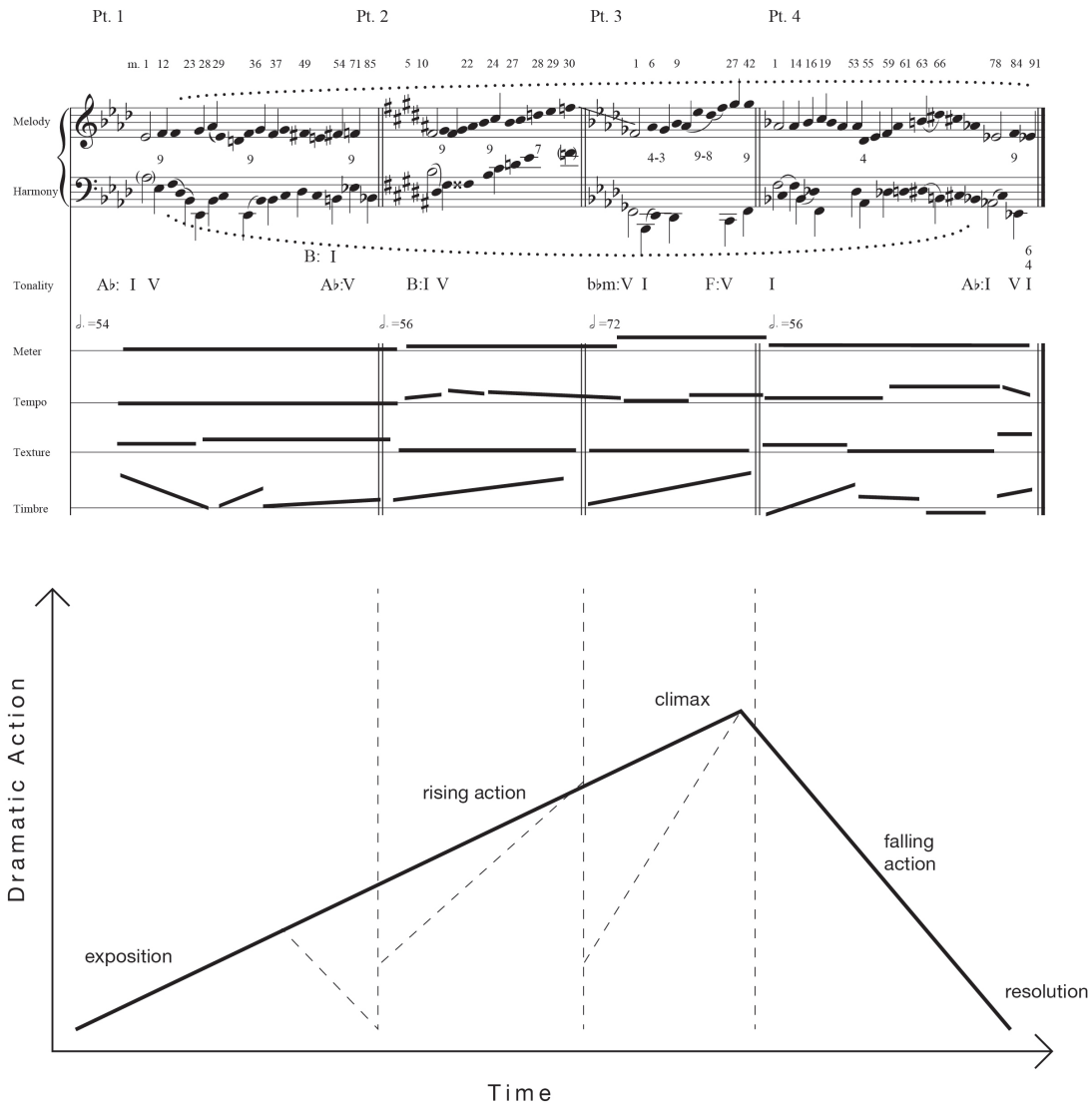


Figure 1-15. Musico-dramatic intensity analysis of "Flashback."

Throughout *Passion*, Sondheim demonstrates his mastery at holding together larger dramatic scenes through musical means. "Flashback" is one of many examples of how his mastery of the extended musical scene shapes the entire musical, and ultimately his own musico-dramatic style.

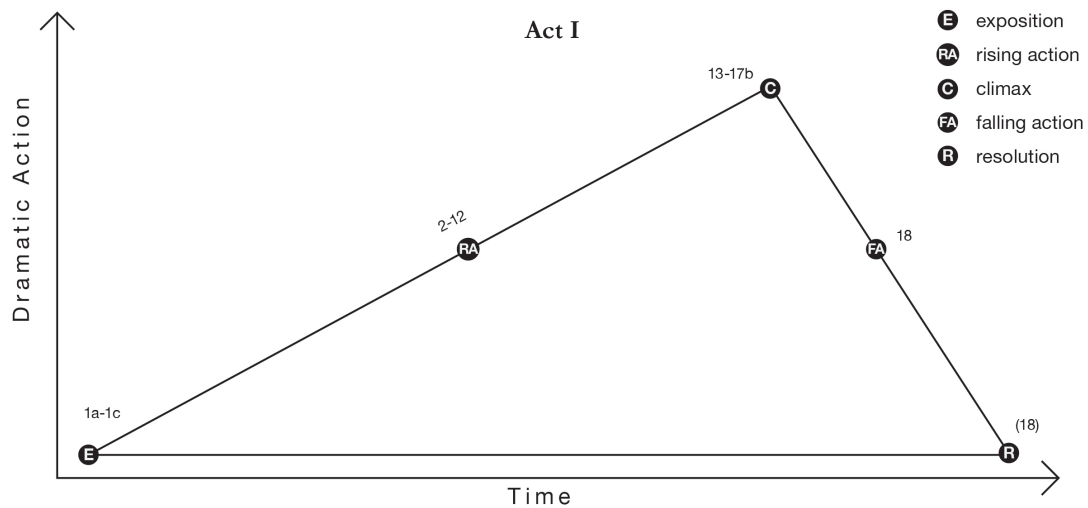


Figure 1-16. *Passion* as a whole.

Conclusion on Dramatic Concerns

Steve Swayne's opinion is that in order to ascertain a style for Sondheim, one needs to take into account more than the music alone:

And as should be clear from the outset, 'sound,' in Sondheim's case, means much more than music...an analysis of how a character comes to act or think is just as important in exploring Sondheim's sound as is a melodic or harmonic analysis. Thus we cannot understand his sound by considering the music alone...We must draw upon music, theater, and film to begin to enter Sondheim's sound world.⁶⁰

I have built upon Swayne's work by showing that Sondheim's musical decisions are linked to and directed by dramatic principles. Sondheim's use of dramatic recursion in his formal construction of musicals both establishes him in the tradition of the American musical theater and sets him apart. He follows traditional dramatic constructs, even when working within what some scholars call a "concept musical," where plot development is subordinate to some other central idea, such as modern marriage in *Company*. However, it is his greater use of recursion and micro-development of musical and dramatic intensity

⁶⁰ Swayne, *How Sondheim Found His Sound*, 3.

in the use of multi-song musical scenes that sets him apart from his predecessors.

Examples like “Flashback (Part 4)” in *Passion*, where the voices resolve to tonic but the accompaniment does not, set Sondheim apart in the ways in which he writes music to fit the larger dramatic needs.

Although it is important to consider the dramatic context in which Sondheim writes his musicals, it is possible to go a step further than Swayne and analyze musical choices as being bound together by a particular style or musical language. By providing a musico-dramatic context, there is now an overarching context in which to consider Sondheim’s musical voice. The following chapters focus more intrinsically on how Sondheim’s detailed musical choices work together to define his style.

Chapter 2. Accompaniment

That's fairly typical of what I do: find the rhythm of the person talking and find the emotional color of the person talking, put them together and make an accompaniment figure.

—Stephen Sondheim¹

Sondheim combines dramatic concerns—which include “emotional color”—with musical implications from speech patterns—the “rhythm of the person talking”—to create his musical accompaniments. Although Sondheim’s quotation makes this sound like an effortless task, it is clear through both a survey of scholarship and Sondheim’s further quotations that the composition of accompaniments requires significant work. This chapter aims to typify the primary types of accompaniment that Sondheim uses throughout his work. After rooting Sondheim’s use of accompaniment in established musical theater traditions, the ways in which Sondheim alters these patterns to express his own musical voice and ascertain how these elements collaborate in communicating a style for Sondheim will be analyzed.²

In an interview with Mark Eden Horowitz, Sondheim elaborates upon the musical process adumbrated in the quotation above:

Quite often the accompaniment figure may be the first thing that comes. For example, I remember for ‘Not a Day Goes By,’ I invented the accompaniment figure before the tune came...And then somehow that suggested the tune, but I began with the so-called vamp, the accompaniment figure, and that’s a simple one. Accompaniment figures don’t have to be elaborate arpeggiated figures, they can be something as simple as [something] that expresses a mood... I’d say

¹ Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 204.

² In exploring scholarship of musical theater and other twentieth-century popular music idioms, it is rare to find much discussion on accompaniment at all. Because of this, I will be bringing together bits and pieces from existing scholarship, but ultimately creating many of my own categorizations for accompaniments used by Sondheim.

probably more often than not, the thing that comes first in the music is either the accompaniment figure or some kind of harmonic progression... usually it's a combination of rhythm and harmony in the accompaniment figure that is the seed of the song.³ I rarely start with just a melodic line without some kind of harmonic underpinning... I do use the piano, and quite often it will be for inventing an accompaniment figure. I sometimes have a rhythm in my head, but I don't think I've ever written a real accompaniment figure in my head, only the rhythm of it, or the harmony of it, but not the whole thing. Usually it's worked out with my fingers.⁴

Sondheim also sees accompaniment as one of the major factors in distinguishing musical style: "It's not just one chord or chordal progression, but there are accompaniment figures, registers and all that that distinguish Brahms and Beethoven."⁵

His comments place an immense importance on the composition of accompaniment. The working out of an accompaniment takes precedence over, and even directs the composition of, other musical factors. This gives the accompaniment a degree of primacy as a musical feature in Sondheim's work. Since it is the primary feature of composition, it is natural to begin with assessing how accompaniment leads to an identifiable musical style.⁶

Sondheim will often refer to these accompaniments as "vamps." A vamp in musical theater is generally defined as any time the pit musicians repeat bars of music until the actors are ready to continue the song, scene or dramatic action. These typically

³ Sondheim's mentioning of "the seed of the song" is a highly suggestive metaphor that is closely linked to other such metaphors, such as his earlier analyzed discussion of the "long line" and composing out the third or the fifth. All of these suggest a Schenkerian, or at least a generative, approach to composition.

⁴ Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 203.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁶ Character names have often been left out of the music examples because of the focus on accompaniment. In cases where specific characterization is discussed, the character's name will be given in the prose discussing the example.

take place at the beginning of songs, or take place within a song after non-notated monologue or dialogue. They are also referred to as a “safety,” which better reflects the purpose of the music; it provides a cushion of time in which the singer/actors can finish the spoken dialogue and then move to singing. Vamps typically establish a sense of tonic through prolongation of tonic or dominant, as they are usually introductory or interstitial to the musical phrase. In Sondheim’s scores, vamps also typically contain regular accompaniment figures.

“I’m Calm” from *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (example 2-1) shows a typical vamp. The pit musicians repeat the first measure until the actor has finished his dialogue and is ready to begin the song. Once the singer begins singing, the vamp ends and the song continues. The bass alternates between tonic and dominant, with a coloration of the tonic chord in the right hand, providing a secure foundation for the tonality of this song.

HYSTERIUM: Calm? Calm?
Musn't be excited. Calm. Calm.

Fast- In 1 (When Ready)
Vamp (HYSTERIUM)

Example 2-1. *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, “I’m Calm,” m. 1.

Sondheim’s use of the word “vamp” places it in accordance with the more standard term “accompaniment.” Although vamps are often used at least as framework for the following accompaniment patterns, the term “vamp” should not be used

interchangeably with the term “accompaniment.” Accompaniment will be the term used hereafter.

Sondheim’s use of archetypal accompaniments for particular types of characters or dramatic situations is an extremely important aspect of what makes his sound unified from show to show. Steve Swayne says, “for Sondheim, the accompaniments are integral to the songs.”⁷ They are integral not only to the songs themselves, but also to the characters that these songs are divulging to the audience, and for the recognition of character types, and even song styles throughout Sondheim’s output.⁸

To convey the drama musically, Sondheim says that he begins with some kind of accompaniment figure.⁹ He describes trying to find the “mood” of the character and scene through the use of musical accompaniment. At times he will also play against the assumed mood, which adds a level of irony, making it difficult to recognize character types from a pattern, stating, “one of my [favorite] devices is to use either a light-hearted accompaniment for a very bloody lyric, bloody in the sense of full of juice and text, or vice versa—to use very rich music in a very light way. I like that kind of conflict.”¹⁰ An

⁷ Swayne, *How Sondheim Found His Sound*, 117.

⁸ For *Follies*, Sondheim purposefully included pastiche by imitating styles from 1930s Follies shows. He again employs pastiche in other shows like the European and Russian admiral segments of “Please, Hello”, the British Parlor songs in *Sweeney Todd*, and many of the songs in *Assassins*. Some question whether a pastiche Sondheim number is still stylistically Sondheim. His voice is still likely to come through, even when attempting to sound like another composer. As mentioned in the introduction, Steve Swayne analyzes Sondheim’s imitative voice—including the use of pastiche—in great depth in his dissertation.

⁹ Herbert, “Sondheim’s Technique,” 199. Also throughout Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*.

example is the light, major mode waltz accompaniment used in “A Little Priest,” from *Sweeney Todd*, conflicting with the grotesque subject matter of eating meat pies made of people.

Stephen Banfield describes five different types of accompaniment sketches in his book *Sondheim’s Broadway Musicals*. These are unpublished and unused accompaniments from Sondheim’s collection of manuscripts. In a discussion on Sondheim’s compositional process, Banfield states that the character of the accompaniment affects how a song turns out. “All five of these sketches have strong and highly differentiated characters.”¹¹

Ex. 2.8a



Ex. 2.8b



¹⁰ Herbert, "Sondheim's Technique," 202. This provides intriguing fodder for a study of musico-dramatic relationships, but further discussion here is ultimately a digression from the current topic.

¹¹ Stephen Banfield, *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 73.

Ex. 2.8c

Ex. 2.8d

Ex. 2.8e

$\text{♩} = 152$

Figure 2-1. Five accompaniment sketches from Banfield's
Sondheim's Broadway Musicals.

Banfield does not spend much more of his text discussing accompaniments, nor does he provide a catalogue of accompaniments, or a deeper analysis of these five besides his general description of their character. Since these particular instances were not specifically used in any of Sondheim's musicals, it was not imperative for Banfield to have analyzed them any deeper. However, a deeper analysis of the accompaniment patterns actually used in Sondheim's works can help a listener or a performer understand how accompaniments affect the perceived style of Stephen Sondheim.

Eric Sams establishes precedence for such categorization with his books on the songs of Hugo Wolf, Robert Schumann and Johannes Brahms.¹² Sams discusses “motifs” in each composer’s lieder, many of which are found within the accompaniment. Each motif represents some kind of characterization that links the music with the text and is distinctly labeled (M1, M2, etc.). In the Wolf text, his labeling includes descriptors such as “unrest” and “manliness.” Sams’s label of unrest (physical or mental) comes from the “sharply rising semitone” of a repeated figure such as the one in figure 2-2.¹³

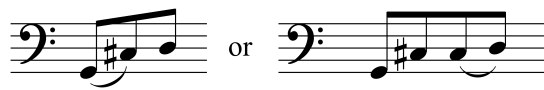


Figure 2-2. Sams's Wolf motif M. 5, "Unrest, unease."

Another example from Sams is “manliness,” which is attributed to the “strongly ascending bass line,” either being diatonic or chromatic.¹⁴



Figure 2-3. Sams's Wolf motif M. 6, "Manliness."

Motifs are generally one to two measures in length, and typically deal with a specific pattern in one staff. Musical factors that decide each motif are any combination

¹² See Eric Sams, *The Songs of Hugo Wolf* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992); — — —, *The Songs of Robert Schumann* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993); — — —, and *The Songs of Johannes Brahms* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).

¹³ Sams, *The Songs of Hugo Wolf*, 20.

¹⁴ Ibid.

of rhythmic patterns, melodic patterns, harmonic intervals or progressions, or textural patterns.

Some of Sams's motifs may be applicable to Sondheim's accompaniments. His work is helpful in establishing a methodology for categorizing Sondheim's accompaniment "motives" and finding these patterns across multiple shows. However, Sams concentrates solely on nineteenth-century German *lieder*, and Sondheim's songwriting stems more directly from a tradition of American popular song. It is limited in that it does not provide many generic accompaniment types, nor does it dissect rhythmic, metric, textural or harmonic elements of the accompaniment types.

Robert Gjerdingen's definition of schemata provides one missing piece of the puzzle, in that schemata can be used to deal with generic accompaniment types. Although difficult to define precisely, Gjerdingen defines schemata in three related, yet specific ways: prototypes, exemplars, and theories. By prototypes, he refers to the abstraction of commonalities from similar experiences. Exemplars are different in that they are individual, discrete examples of something one might label as a prototype. A theory develops from a person's experience with exemplars or prototypes, being projected to ideas with which they are not yet familiar.¹⁵

Gjerdingen sets parameters to distinguish differences of type from differences of kind.¹⁶ However, accompaniment prototype schemata spawn a number of variations in real music examples. At times it can be difficult to choose whether a pattern is a variation of one schema, or something entirely new. Each accompaniment schema distinguishes

¹⁵ Robert Gjerdingen, *Music in the Galant Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 10-11.

¹⁶ Gjerdingen's schemata only deal with the outer two voices.

itself from other types through specific musical parameters (i.e. metrical or rhythmic). In order to properly define any given texture as a particular type of accompaniment, each of the types must be distinguished from each other using *distinctive features*, after David Huron.¹⁷ Huron defines distinctiveness in a musical feature as having “greater salience [how noticeable a music event is] compared to occurrences in other artifacts.”¹⁸

Essentially, distinctive features are musical elements that make a particular accompaniment schema unique. By formulating distinctive features of particular schema and then showcasing an exemplar of the schema, one can more thoroughly understand differences in accompaniment patterns. After these schemata have been established, the more difficult to categorize accompaniment patterns that Sondheim uses will be compared to the exemplars, and the analysis of how he stretches traditional patterns will demonstrate specific aspects of his musical style.

The most salient, style-defining accompaniments occur within proper songs. Consideration of proper songs excludes any kind of musical introduction or coda, dance sequences and other musical interludes. It is only where the schemata are actually accompanying lyrics that the analysis will take place.

As with dramatic concerns, each accompaniment type is rooted in a traditional Broadway or Classical song accompaniment pattern. However, a typical waltz pattern for Chopin may be different than that of Johann Strauss or Richard Rodgers, and even

¹⁷ See David Huron, "What Is a Musical Feature? Forte's Analysis of Brahms's Opus 51, No. 1, Revisited," in *Music Theory Online* (The Society for Music Theory, 2001).

¹⁸ Ibid., Table 1.

different still for Sondheim.¹⁹ Because of this, distinctive features and exemplars are limited to Broadway composers that most directly influenced Sondheim.²⁰

Sondheim rarely works strictly within an accompaniment schema; rather he stretches and flexes each schema, much like he stretches and flexes standard Broadway song forms to follow dramatic concerns. Only after the parameters are set can one identify how far Sondheim can stretch any given type until it is no longer distinguishable as that particular type. After providing an exemplar from traditional Broadway musicals, one specific Sondheim exemplar is proposed for each category to pinpoint the schema. Since Sondheim's style is the ultimate concern, there will be additional examples of his alternate forms of the schema.

There are several utilities for such categorization of accompaniment schemata. Once they are defined, it is easy for an analyst or performer to identify them throughout Sondheim's work, and then to compare the ways in which Sondheim uses them with how another composer uses them. Also, after establishing distinctive features and presenting an exemplar, it is easier to identify elaborations of these models and to analyze any kind of divergence from these parameters. Once elaborations are identified, one is then able to

¹⁹ Further complicating the issue is finding a standard label for these accompaniments. Some used here are obvious to most musicians, whereas others are borrowed from specific texts, or created specifically for analyzing Sondheim, with descriptions as to why such a label was chosen.

²⁰ See Swayne, *How Sondheim Found His Sound*. Swayne offers that "The Big Six"—Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, Richard Rodgers, George Gershwin and Harold Arlen—most directly influenced Sondheim. Along with a number of these composers, I have chosen exemplars from Leonard Bernstein because of his impact on both musical theater and classical music and because Sondheim worked as his lyricist for *West Side Story*.

discuss why such an elaboration was made, which for Sondheim will likely be for dramatic reasons.

In essence, there are three primary musical parameters that enable the categorization of accompaniment schemata—meter/rhythm, harmony and melody—with secondary musical features that add a particular sense of character. First, Sondheim uses a range of meters, from simple to complex, in his accompaniments. Most of them are in duple or triple beat divisions, but it is not unusual for there to be an occasional mixed meter incorporated within a phrase. Rhythmic devices fall within or occur across different meters. Surface level events such as syncopation, groupings of subdivisions, and so on help to define accompaniment schemata. The second parameter deals with harmonic patterns, in which the specific use of the verticalities defines the distinctive features of the accompaniment. The third parameter is melody. The use of distinctive features such as arpeggiation also leads to the identification of schemata.

The Broadway Musical Accompaniment Schemata

The following categories of accompaniment schemata are not unique to Stephen Sondheim. They derive from a rich tradition of musical theater songwriting, which Sondheim was immersed in from his childhood. It is important to show how Sondheim fits into this tradition before demonstrating how he developed his own style that flexes and elaborates upon these accompaniment schemata. Much of this style developed over time, and so many of the most distinct exemplars of these categories come from Sondheim's earlier output, when he was still finding his voice. While this list is not exhaustive, it represents the primary accompaniment schemata from the Broadway tradition that Sondheim employs.

Category 1: Rhythmic/Metric Types

1a. The Waltz

Eric McKee provides criteria for what distinguishes a prototypical waltz from other accompaniments.²¹ According to McKee, the standard waltz contains an “um-pah-pah” accompaniment where beats two and three are identical and distinctly higher in register than the bass on beat one, and a duration of two measures to make it more complete. McKee’s criteria also include melodic shape as a necessary feature, but for the purposes of this study melody will be considered apart from accompaniment. The melodic arch will be considered as an extraneous feature, if it is present in the accompaniment at all.

Measures 5-8 of “Ten Minutes Ago,” from Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II’s *Cinderella*, is a traditional Broadway exemplar of McKee’s prototype. There are very few representations of McKee’s standard waltz in Sondheim’s repertoire, and they almost all occur apart from proper songs. One of the few waltz exemplars occurs in mm. 5-8 of “Transition (scenes 7-8),” from *Passion*.

Varieties of waltz textures are particularly bountiful among Sondheim’s songs. Banfield devotes much of his chapter on *A Little Night Music* to the use of waltz and metrical implications of waltz music.²² This type of analysis is a helpful beginning to the bountiful number of waltz patterns throughout Sondheim’s body of work.

²¹ Erik McKee, “Dance and the Music of Chopin: The Waltz,” in *The Age of Chopin: Interdisciplinary Inquiries*, ed. Halina Goldberg (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 126-27.

²² Banfield, *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals*, 225-45.

Most of Sondheim's waltz schemata contain some change from the prototypical form. The notes between the second and third beat may shift like in the "Whaddya wanna get married for" section of "Have I Got a Girl for You" from *Company* (mm. 108-109). Often, the third beat is omitted, and a half note occurs on beat two, as in mm. 3-6 of "The Miller's Son," from *A Little Night Music*. Scholars and critics have been quick to notice that (almost) all of the music in *A Little Night Music* is some sort of permutation of a waltz.

Some variations of the waltz still retain the distinctive features of low bass on beat one and registrally distinct notes on weaker beats. However, these variations employ some kind of regular rhythmic variant in the treble. "In Praise of Women," from *A Little Night Music*, has a tempo marking indicating a "polonaise" rhythmic flair for the accompaniment, making the weaker beats more rhythmically active, but still related to the waltz schema. Sondheim does not typically use dance terms like "polonaise" or "mazurka," as seen in "The Glamorous Life," from *A Little Night Music*, as tempo markings to mean something specific metrically or rhythmically. Instead, he is often just trying to convey a particular mood to the performers. These examples are reminiscent of Chopin's polonaises and mazurkas, yet are imbued with Sondheim's musical voice.

1b. "Boom-Chick"²³

The boom-chick pattern is particularly prevalent in Sondheim's earlier musicals, acting as a bridge to traditional musical comedy. By simply perusing a collection of

²³ This label is from Allen Cohen and Steven L. Rosenhaus, *Writing Musical Theater* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 130.

famous Broadway songs from the 1930s to the 1960s, it is strikingly apparent that this accompaniment is one of the most common in this period of songwriting.²⁴ The distinctive features of this pattern are: a simple duple or quadruple meter; an alternation of registrally distinct strong and weak beats, with the bass being on a stronger beat, or stronger part of the beat, and the treble being on the weaker beat, or weaker part of the beat. Secondary features of this type are that, typically, the first bass note of the measure is the root of the chord; the second bass note is the fifth—typically played down a fourth or up a fifth from the root—or possibly the root played an octave above or below. Also, the treble usually plays single notes or chords that are part of the harmony of the previous bass note. Similar to the waltz, the standard boom-chick contains an alternating um-pah accompaniment, where beat two is distinctly higher in register than the beat one bass. Meter is an important distinctive feature of the boom-chick, in that it is always duple or quadruple. It is typical that the bass note on beat three is different than that of beat one in a boom-chick. In a waltz, the bass is often repeated measure to measure.

This schema was very popular among composers of musical comedy, is used for marches, can-cans, fox-trots and other styles. When Sondheim is consciously evoking an older musical theater style, like he does in *Follies*, this pattern appears often. Also, since *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* is written as a typical musical comedy, it is not surprising that this pattern appears quite often in this musical.

The traditional Broadway exemplar for the boom-chick comes from mm. 37-40 of Cole Porter's "Take Me Back to Manhattan," from *The New Yorkers*. The Sondheim exemplar chosen for this schema is mm. 41-45 of "Live, Laugh, Love" from *Follies*.

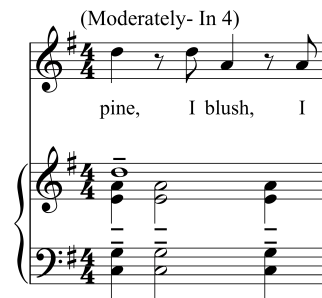
²⁴ See, for example, *100 Years of Broadway*, (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 1994).

Since Sondheim is often imitating 1920s and 1930s Broadway styles for this show, this is a very appropriate accompaniment pattern for this song.

Occasionally, Sondheim exercises his voice by manipulating this pattern so that it is reversed, giving the sense of “Chick-Boom.” This creates the particular effect in that the bass plays on the weak beats, accenting these beats and slightly disrupting the sense of meter. “Poor Baby,” from *Company*, utilizes this reversal of the pattern in mm. 3-4 and mm. 43-44. One question that arises these examples is whether or not one perceives the downbeat at the bar line, or if instead it is felt on beat two. The examples shift the treble from the standard “boom-chick” schema—to harmonize and double the melody—to beat one, making it easier to perceive the downbeat as matching the bar line. Because this eventually changes to a more standard accompaniment schema, it is likely that this will be felt as a metric shift. This gives a sense of metric ambiguity each time the “poor baby” chorus enters and then returns to the regular, common time pattern in mm. 11-12.

1c. Short-Long-Short

The distinctive feature of this schema is simply the use of a short-long-short, regular rhythmic pattern in either the treble or bass. In common time, the pattern is typically seen as quarter–half–quarter. The vertical chord structure is typically repeated throughout the measure as well. Like the boom-chick, this schema is also commonly found in more traditional Broadway songs. The exemplar comes from mm. 69-72 of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s “Cockeyed Optimist,” from *South Pacific*. This pattern is less common in Sondheim’s more mature work. It can be found in earlier works like m. 39 of “Love, I Hear,” from *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*.



**Example 2-2. *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*,
"Love I Hear," m. 39.**

1d. Latin Dances

The use of Latin dances and Afro-Cuban rhythms came into popular use in twentieth-century American music. Leonard Bernstein regularly used Latin rhythms in his musicals. There are a large number of these rhythms or dance types, and many of these rhythms have a clear influence on American popular music idioms. The distinctive features of the Latin accompaniments have to do primarily with signifiers like a *bossa nova*, *habanera*, *tresillo* or *rhumba* bass line. With this, the treble is typically syncopated against the given meter, often with groupings of three.

One example of a traditional Broadway song that uses Latin rhythms is mm. 5-7 of Rodgers and Hart's "No Other Love," from *Me and Juliet*. Although the influence of Latin rhythm does prevail throughout musical theater composers's accompaniments, Sondheim rarely uses them specifically in his musicals. In the same way that he used polonaise and mazurka to give an idea of character to the performers, he uses tango and *bossa nova* to elicit a "Latin-esque" feel, such as in mm. 2-6 and m. 50 of "The Little Things You Do Together," from *Company*. "The Ladies Who Lunch," from *Company*, begins with a *rubato*, alternating chordal pattern, but transforms to the *bossa nova*

accompaniment at m. 23 for the rest of the number. The treble syncopation adds to the Latin character of the piece.

1e. *Tresillo* (3+3+2)

The syncopation of the *tresillo* relates this rhythm to Latin dances, but the particular use of this pattern in Broadway musicals can often be found in the fox-trot tradition. The distinctive feature is the 3+3+2 rhythmic pattern. George and Ira Gershwin's "Oh Lawd, I'm On My Way," from *Porgy and Bess* provides the exemplar in mm. 23-25.²⁵ Sondheim uses this rhythm in the B section of "The Little Things You Do Together," from *Company*, mm. 26-27.

Category 2: Harmonic Types

2a. Journeying

The journeying schema derives its name from Sondheim's description of its utility: "[Little Red's introduction in *Into the Woods*] is a walking number...that would reflect musically what it means to take a journey."²⁶ The distinctive features of this schema are the treble playing steady, block harmonies on each beat of the measure, and that the harmonic rhythm is at least one measure in length. Typically, each verticality lasts an entire beat, although there are cases in which the beat may be subdivided, with the effect being a faster journey.

²⁵ "Maria" from Bernstein's *West Side Story* also deserves mention as a famous *tresillo*, particularly because of the Latin context.

²⁶ Roger Englander, "*Into the Woods* Video Conversationpiece," (New York: Music Theatre International). 00:09:22-00:09:33.

Jerome Kern's "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man," from *Showboat* gives a typical journeying pattern in mm. 47-50. The journeying schema is particularly plentiful throughout Sondheim's *Into the Woods*, as in mm. 27-28 of "Act One Opening (Part 2)." The exemplar of this motive is taken from the number Sondheim discusses, although in a later section.²⁷ Another example is mm. 7-8 of "A Weekend in the Country," from *A Little Night Music*, which gives the image of a carriage or car moving, since this is the implied method of transportation for the travelers. This type of motion-driven accompaniment harkens back to Schubert's *Der Erlkönig*. Also, the tempo indication—"Alla Marcia"—clearly links it to a march.

2b. Release and Neighbor

Similar in texture to journeying is the release and neighbor schemata. These patterns typically have closely spaced chords on every beat of the right hand, but beats three and four involve a resolution-type motion of the first two beats. In the release, a tone or tones of the chord move upward or downward resolving a harmonic dissonance. The neighbor involves the tone or tones moving to a more dissonant chord.

The release schema is one that is rarely found in traditional Broadway literature. Measure 11-12 of Rodgers and Hammerstein's "The Surrey with the Fringe on Top" from *Oklahoma!* is similar in its treble execution, except that each chord is consonant with the bass. The true exemplar from Sondheim is featured in mm. 55-56 of "Opening," from *Assassins*.

²⁷ The example Sondheim gives is not used because it works better as a variant of the basic journey schema, called "release," which is discussed below.

The neighbor schema is also rare. However, mm. 7-9 of “Lonely Room,” from *Oklahoma!* provides a true exemplar of this pattern. Sondheim uses the neighbor in mm. 5-6 of “Act One Opening (Part 2),” from *Into the Woods*.

2c. Oscillating

An oscillating accompaniment is one in which a note or a chord is established, left, and then returned to. It is most effective when occurring within a single beat, but can alternate beats as well. The rhythm of the oscillation is typically quick, and must last at least two measures. Chords are more typical than single notes.

An oscillating schema is found in mm. 6-9 of Leonard Bernstein’s “Tonight” from *West Side Story*. Sondheim’s version in m. 14a of “Lesson #8,” from *Sunday in the Park with George*, is similar, although in a compound meter. The simplest oscillation of a single note is seen in mm. 4-5 of “He’s a Very Nice Prince,” from *Into the Woods*. In this case, the oscillation is happening in the bass, while the treble arpeggiates. Rodgers and Hart’s “Mountain Greenery,” from *Garrick Gaieties* provides an exemplar of oscillating by beat, rather than subdivision, in mm. 57-59. Sondheim creates a similar effect in mm. 87-91 of “The One on the Left,” from *Sunday in the Park with George*.

2d. Chordal

The chordal schema is defined by its homophonic texture. All the voices in both melody and accompaniment must move together. Measures 5-6 of George Gershwin’s song “Strike Up the Band,” from *Strike Up the Band*, uses a chordal schema.

This pattern is also less common in Sondheim. However, he uses it to emphasize the melodic rhythm in “That’ll Show Him,” from *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*.

(Moderately- In 4)

Let the cap - tain wed me and woo me.

pp

**Example 2-3. *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*,
"That'll Show Him," mm. 1-2.**

Category 3: Melodic Types

3a. Triad Arpeggiation

A triad arpeggiation schema is simply one in which a triad is broken into a melodic, arpeggiating texture. It is considered a melodic gesture, because the notes of the arpeggiation are typically attacked independently of one another. The specific rhythms and meters of this schema can vary widely. Measures 8-11 of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s “You’ll Never Walk Alone,” from *Carousel*, is a typical use of triad arpeggiation. Sondheim rarely uses simple triads in any of his harmonic language. Examples of triadic accompaniment are also rare, with the exception of *Passion*. Dramatically, triad arpeggios are used to evoke military bugle calls throughout the score. This typically occurs in the treble, with a dissonant bass, as in m. 13 of “Happiness (Part 1).”

3b. Extended Tertian Arpeggiation

Composers sometimes arpeggiate through an extended tertian chord or quartal sonority rather than a simple triad. Dominant and other tonal, diatonic seventh chords are typical throughout musical theater literature. However, the use of further extended chords such as diatonic or chromatic ninth, eleventh and thirteenth chords and quartal sonorities create a different sound universe. Rodgers and Hart's "My Romance" is an exemplar, using a number of chromatic extension tertian chords throughout. Sondheim commonly arpeggiates extended tertian sonorities throughout his work. For example, "Putting it Together," from *Sunday in the Park with George*, shows an arpeggiated $G\flat 13$ in mm. 1a-3.²⁸

One common variety of the arpeggiation is one that incorporates more pop syncopations. Distinctive features of pop arpeggiation are melodic arpeggiation in either or both clefs, and a syncopated, pop-rhythm. Often this syncopation involves a short-long rhythm at the beginning of the bar. The exemplar chosen for this schema is m. 24 of "Our Time" from *Merrily We Roll Along*.

The finger-picking pattern is another type of arpeggiated texture used by Sondheim. It approximates a finger picking style of a string instrument, such as guitar. It does not necessarily follow idiomatic guitar playing styles, but evokes guitar playing by isolating arpeggiated pitches in a regular rhythmic gesture. This is different than simple arpeggiation because of the multiple lines present on the staves, so contrapuntal texture is essential to this schema.

²⁸ Some may hear this as a quartal sonority. I have chosen to call it a $G\flat 13$ because of the strong bass $G\flat$ on beat one of the first measure of the accompaniment.

The exemplar is mm. 5-6 of “Another Hundred People” from *Company*. Each line of the accompaniment is written as a separate, contrapuntal idea. However, they are interconnected through the type of rhythmic arpeggiation you would find a guitar player executing.

Sondheim’s Voice

Although Sondheim’s use of accompaniment has its origins in traditional musical theater accompaniment schemata, Sondheim manipulates these schemata to further develop his personal style. Besides some of the smaller ways in which he alters familiar patterns shown above, particular ways in which he makes accompaniments his own are the use of mixed and asymmetrical meters, developing accompaniment, and other problematic accompaniment patterns.

Accompaniments with Mixed Meters

Sondheim does not consistently use mixed meters, where time signatures are changed in successive measures so as to disrupt metric regularity, in his music.²⁹ When he does employ them, it often accommodates lyrics or provides the backdrop to a distinct dramatic situation. An occasional measure of $\frac{7}{4}$ or $\frac{5}{4}$ is sometimes interpolated into a phrase of duple or triple meter, usually to extend the phrase and accommodate text setting. These additions act as extended measures within the regular meter, giving a sense of written *rubato*. The extra beat or beats will often be used as an extended anacrusis to the downbeat of the next measure. Mixed meters are typically employed for dramatic

²⁹ Adapted from Earl Henry and Michael Rogers, *Tonality and Design in Music Theory*, vol. 1. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc., 2005), 29-30.

situations, and often give the sense that a character is unbalanced or a situation is unstable.

The use of mixed meters can be found early in Sondheim's career. "Simple," from *Anyone Can Whistle* (example 2-4), features a juxtaposition of triple time and cut time in mm. 16-27. This creates a disconnect between the message of the lyrics—"Simple? Simple? Simple as A, B, C. Simple as one two three!"—and the not-so-simple, irregular meter in the accompaniment. The dramatic situation deals with the sanity of people and people groups, and so the disconnect created by the metric instability serves the drama well.

(Moderato)

In 1 In 2

Sim-ple? Sim-ple? Sim-ple? Sim-ple as A, B, C. Sim-ple as one two three!

mp

Example 2-4. *Anyone Can Whistle*, "Simple," mm. 16-27.

Mixed meters are found in the chorus of “The Worst Pies in London,” from *Sweeney Todd*, particularly mm. 13-24. The asymmetrical, duple time and common time measures are mixed in with the “regular” triple time bars, allowing for extended upbeat melodic runs in mm. 18 and 21, especially. The unbalanced nature of these phrases may be evoking the fragile psychological state of Mrs. Lovett.

The show that most often utilizes mixed meters is *Passion*. Because so much of the show shares qualities with operatic recitative, and since the musical scenes are often connecting fragmented melodic ideas, there is an increase in the use of metric irregularity that stretches the musical phrases to fit the dramatic ideas and the lyrics. An example is the beginning of Fosca’s first complete song, mm. 16-19 of “Fosca’s Entrance (Part 1),” where Sondheim uses $\frac{7}{4}$ and $\frac{5}{4}$ to gradually begin the song conversationally before more or less settling into $\frac{4}{4}$.

Developing Accompaniment

Good Broadway composers and orchestrators provide variety within the basic song forms to create interest. In the first chorus, a countermelody might occur in the woodwinds, whereas in the second chorus there might be a string countermelody. Musical elements from rhythm to harmony might undergo variation for contrast in repeated sections.

Sondheim takes this notion a step further in what will be called *developing accompaniment*. In developing accompaniment, Sondheim gradually increases the texture of the accompaniment patterns within songs throughout his body of work. Since

developing accompaniment is rare throughout musical theater literature, it becomes that much more a distinctive feature of Sondheim's compositional voice.

Arnold Schoenberg provides precedence for developing accompaniment with his concept of developing variation.³⁰ Schoenberg's own, concise definition best applies to Sondheim: "Variation of the features of a basic unit produces all the thematic formulations which provide for fluency, contrasts, variety, logic and unity on the one hand, and character, mood, expression, and every needed differentiation, on the other hand—thus elaborating the *idea* of the piece."³¹ Schoenberg's definition takes into account character, mood, and expression, all of which are pivotal to music for the theater.

A simple example occurs in a developing accompaniment figure from *Company*, coming from the vamp in the title song. The vamp in m. 1 opens the song and essentially opens the show as well, since it follows the overture. This vamp has a dramatic function in that it emulates an alarm clock, which plays and establishes the tempo just before the song begins. In m. 1, the vamp is prolonging a subdominant in D \flat , although with a

³⁰ In his book *Brahms and the Concept of Developing Variation*, Walter Frisch summarizes Schoenberg's writings on developing variation as "the construction of a theme (usually of eight bars) by the continuous modification of the intervallic and/or rhythmic components of an initial idea." Since we are not dealing with thematic phrase structure, this definition only applies to Sondheim's accompaniment in terms of modifying eight-bar themes. A different summary of the technique of developing variation by J. Peter Burkholder in his essay "Schoenberg the Reactionary" more aptly fits Sondheim's technique: "Within each piece, [Schoenberg] created a world in which exact repetition is avoided, while each new idea is derived from what has come before...while avoiding repetition both within and between pieces." In a similar way, Sondheim will sometimes begin an accompaniment schema very simply, and develop it in a variety of ways, sometimes even transforming it into another schema entirely. Neither definition fits Sondheim's technique as well as Schoenberg's.

³¹ Arnold Schoenberg, "Bach," in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 397.

lowered seventh.³² It is transposed up a step to prolong the dominant seventh in m. 2. Although not technically a vamp because there are a set number of repeats, m. 2 does retain vamp characteristics by being repeated six times. This vamp is then elaborated upon to become the actual accompaniment once the vocal line starts in m. 3. The skeletal structure of alternating treble and bass is in place, with added texture in the treble. The bass includes a simultaneous pitch on the downbeats along with the treble, giving more rhythmic motion to the bass line.

“It’s Hot Up Here” is a more extensive example of how developing accompaniment is used to convey drama in the opening of the second act of *Sunday in the Park with George*. The dramatic backdrop consists of the subjects of Georges Seurat’s painting, *Un dimanche d’été à l’Île de la Grande Jatte*, complaining about being stuck in the heat, with the same people, in an unchanging position for all eternity.

The song develops the dramatic context with the music. In the beginning the characters begin one by one to complain about being stuck forever in a painting. At first, in the A section, there is space between each character’s complaint. Towards the end of the section, the lines are heard in rapid succession with no break, increasing the tension of the characters’s angst. The A section contains most of this conflict, where it changes metrical identity and has much rhythmic irregularity as well. Since the dramatic tension is established early on with the first line—“it’s hot up here”—Sondheim includes areas of respite with the B section music that is a bit more metrically and rhythmically regular.

³² In the original cast recording, the G \flat vamp is omitted entirely, and the A \flat measure is only played four times. This may have been cut during the staging of the show, or simply for purposes of time on the album.

The angst is not as apparent in the lyrics of the B section either, since the ensemble are all complaining in unison about how hot it is, rather than in a chaotic, rapid succession about their personal qualms. As the song progresses, the characters get more agitated and the accompaniment matches the growing angst.

This song employs a blending of accompaniment schemata and textures. The number begins with what appears to be a waltz schema in mm. 1-2. There is a beat one bass followed by a beat two chord that is registrally distinct. Because of the *rubato* tempo and fermatas, there is no indication from hearing this accompaniment of what the meter will be. This helps to introduce the situation and the characters one at a time, with a sense of *rubato* allowing for the song to build in musical and dramatic tension.

A more regular tempo is established in the next section of the song at m. 15. The written and perceived meters match, both being in three. This strengthens the argument for hearing mm. 1-2 in three. However, the sense of waltz schema is underdetermined, since there is a treble chord on beat one and additional, syncopated bass notes. The treble resembles more of a pacing schema at this point. The development of m. 15 first occurs in m. 22, and is exemplified in m. 23. The treble chord texture thickens, and the bass becomes more active. A further thickening of the treble chord occurs in m. 30, creating even greater musical and dramatic tension through this development.

The opening material returns in mm. 32-33, with its own sense of variation. It begins with the waltz's distinctive features reversed since the treble chord occurs before the bass. This is quickly corrected in m. 33, where the next development occurs in the form of the bass sixteenth-eighth figure at the end of beat four. With no *rubato* and a

homorhythmic doubling of the melody in the bass occurring on beat four, the waltz schema is weakened for this section.

While mm. 32-33 stretched the sense of waltz to four beats, m. 43 condenses it to two beats to end the section. A repeated, condensed waltz in two—in common time—shares the distinctive features of a low bass on beats one and three with a registrally distinct chord on beats two and four. It is as though beat three of the typical waltz schema is chopped off. A reasonable argument is that this is simply a boom-chick schema at this point. It meets most of the distinctive features of this pattern. However, it is more likely to be heard as a condensed waltz because of the metrical context, and because the beat one bass is exactly repeated on beat three, instead of being a different bass note a perfect fifth away. It would take more iterations than a single measure at the end of a formal section to make it feel like a boom-chick accompaniment, especially since the B section is in $\frac{3}{4}$ time. The B section returns at m. 44, with the regular three pattern, although the bass becomes more irregular. This continues with a thickening of treble texture into mm. 48-49. The bass is elaborated upon, in various guises of irregularity, until the more regular m. 75.

Elements of the A section are retained at m. 85. The low bass on beat one produces an expectation for the waltz pattern to recur. Beats two and three are the only treble beats to receive chords on the beat, furthering the ambiguity as to whether this is extended waltz territory. However, now both the treble and bass textures have become much more lively, especially after beat three, deconstructing almost any sense of a waltz.

At m. 94, the song's accompaniment culminates into its most complete form. Every beat in the treble, and all except the weak beat two in the bass are played. This established a pattern of strong-weak-strong-weak, becoming a secure four. The four-pattern does not have the final say, however, since a three-pattern re-establishes itself through a journeying accompaniment in m. 112. This song provides a notable example among the many instances of Sondheim's use of developing accompaniment.

“Problematic” Accompaniment Types

Sondheim enjoys using the musico-dramatic art of keeping the listener guessing. In a video conversation piece for *Into the Woods*, he talks about how the very opening chord is meant to keep the listener in a state of flux, so they do not get comfortable after hearing the familiar opening line “Once upon a time.”³³ Throughout his body of work, there are numerous instances where he keeps the listener guessing by varying familiar musical patterns—particularly metrical deformations in accompaniment schemata.

1. The Waltz in Four

It may seem that a distinctive feature of the waltz must be that it is in triple meter. Waltzes are traditionally in triple meter, since that is how they are danced.³⁴ However, if we consider the primary distinctive features of the waltz apart from any metric constraint, we find instances where Sondheim stretches the metric blueprint to allow for what will here be called the “waltz in four”—the first of Sondheim's problematic accompaniment types. The idea of the waltz in four is that the music still sounds like a waltz; however,

³³ Englander, “*Into the Woods* Video Conversationpiece.” 00:06:08-00:08:00.

³⁴ There is historical precedent for waltzes that are not in three. In particular, Tchaikovsky used a waltz in five in the second movement of his Sixth Symphony.

either the second or third beat holds longer than expected. This gives the sense of metrical extension like a *ritardando* or *Luftpause* in the phrase, although it is very specifically notated. A waltz in four still contains the distinctive features of a strong, accented bass, and registrally distinct, metrically weaker upper voices contained in the waltz in three.

One way to invoke a waltz in four is to stretch a waltz in three through the use of different meters. The B section of “The Worst Pies in London,” from *Sweeney Todd*, mm. 13-24 is a prime example. In mm. 15 and 18, the bass clef has a clear sense of waltz in three, meeting the distinctive features of a low bass on beat one and registrally distinct upper voice on beats two and three. However, leading into these measures are measures of $\frac{4}{4}$ and $\frac{5}{4}$. These measures do contain the necessary features of the waltz, with the low bass on beat one and the weak beats three and four. However, these weak beats are extended another beat or two. Hypermetrically, these beats, and even the entirety of mm. 14 and 17 feel like an anacrusis to the regular $\frac{3}{4}$ waltz sections.

This establishes a context for the “regular” waltz in four. “Being Alive” from *Company*, mm. 22-23, is an exemplar for the waltz in four schema. The downbeat open fifth and octave followed by the registrally distinct treble on beat two are two obvious distinctive features of the waltz, which are being hung on a four-beat framework. A motive of five eighth notes extends the phrase, but through the use of a repeated B \flat and A \flat there is a sense that the end of the phrase is slowly falling away, like a glacial calving. They give way to the low B \flat , which then feels like an anacrusis to the next measure, all in a long, extended-beat limbo.

The only difference at mm. 48-49 is that beat three enters in the treble. It is a half note, so the measure could be heard as an extended beat three limbo. However, this beat calls for a *tenuto* after the staccato beat two, slightly undermining the sense of waltz. As the accompaniment develops, mm. 60-61 undermine the waltz even further, with the entrance of a treble beat four. At m. 109, the song “reverts” back to the same sequence of events as m. 22, with a thicker and wider texture. This helps to regain the sense of waltz in four.

“Johanna” from *Sweeney Todd* shows just how delicate a balance there can be between a waltz in four and a regular four pattern. The sense of waltz schema comes from the low E \flat (with accompanying fifth) on beat one of m. 4 followed by the registrally distinct beats two and three. Adding to the sense of waltz, the second and third beats in m. 5 tie across the bar to beat one of m. 6, bypassing beat four. However, there is also no bass on beat one of m. 6, eliminating that distinctive feature of the waltz. The end of the phrase also disrupts the waltz schema because of the early entrance of E \flat 4 in m. 9, and the C4 on beat four in m. 10. The idea of stretching the waltz schema to a four-beat framework is an unusual occurrence in Broadway musicals, and certainly distinguishes Sondheim’s stylistic voice.

2. Emergent Meter

At times, Sondheim begins with what seems to be one type of accompaniment, but eventually it transforms into, or reveals itself to have always been, another type. This is especially true when dealing with metrically over- or underdetermined surfaces in

accompaniment patterns.³⁵ Gretchen Horlacher's work on emerging meter in the music of Steve Reich demonstrates how an ametrical piece of music might attain a sense of metrical hierarchy, and perhaps even lose it again.³⁶ Some of Sondheim's songs project similar phenomena, as the next problematic accompaniment type.

In "Pirelli's Miracle Elixir" from *Sweeney Todd*, the accompaniment begins with a low bass on beat one followed by registrally distinct upper voice on beat two. These are two distinctive features of the waltz. When looking at the score, it is clear that this piece is written in compound quadruple meter, which may indicate that this might become a waltz in four. Nothing is heard on the third beat, and when listening to the music, it is clear that there is more space than just the third beat as well. It is possible to hear this as a fermata on the rest; especially considering that there is nothing happening on beats three or four. The surface of the music is underdetermined in m. 37.

In m. 39, a new event occurs with the bass B \flat on beat four. This starts the process of an emerging quadruple feeling out of the uncertainty as to whether the beginning of this piece might be a waltz or boom-chick accompaniment. More material is added to beats three and four in the treble at m. 45, helping to further solidify a four-beat measure.

Eventually, a third beat does emerge at m. 57, exactly replicating the chord from beat two, which may then bring the listener back to thinking this is a waltz. However, as the music progresses, eventually a fourth beat emerges that exactly replicates beats two

³⁵ Justin London, *Hearing in Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 56-57.

³⁶ See Gretchen Horlacher, "Multiple Meters and Metrical Processes in the Music of Steve Reich," *Intégral* 14/15 (2000/2001).

and three in m. 58. This might allude to a waltz in four, but because of the regularity of the fourth beat, a quadruple pattern asserts itself. The pattern is not complete yet; in m. 59 the repeated chord arrives on beat one as well, taking away any sense of waltz by eliminating the needed distance between bass and treble voices on beat one. The quadruple meter pattern has emerged at this point, but is not in its finished form. The bass adds a repeated beat one note on beat three, giving the sense of strong-weak- (strong)-weak in a four pattern. The journeying schema becomes a march-like neighbor schema at m. 67.

After the meter has shown itself to be a regular four pattern, Sondheim continues to develop it. The bass line becomes more lively as the number progresses, with a dominant anacrusis to each strong beat, changing the character of the accompaniment ever so slightly, as seen in m. 72. At m. 89, the bass begins to take an arpeggiated, *habanera* type of motion, changing the character even more.

Now that the meter has been solidified as quadruple, the meter changes again at m. 142 to $\frac{2}{4}$ and resumes the registrally distinct beats one and two that are indicative of either the waltz or boom-chick schemas. The bass line's move to dominant strengthens the case for boom-chick, but the repeated treble chord is missing. The accompaniment in m. 142 is further developed in m. 150, but does little to solidify the boom-chick. As the tempo quickens, and the musico-dramatic intensity heightens as the crowd is informed that they have been duped, the accompaniment changes once more to a solid, even $\frac{2}{4}$ arpeggiated pattern in the bass with running sixteenths in the treble in m. 160.

“Pirelli’s Miracle Elixir” traverses through a developing accompanimental process where several meters emerge throughout the song. This use of emergent meter shows how Sondheim uses accompaniment to increase musico-dramatic intensity and is another way in which he showcases his musical voice.

Issues in Identifying Accompaniment in Sondheim

There are many occasions in which Sondheim chooses to use particular distinctive features from more than one accompaniment schema at the same time. This presents the idea that accompaniments are composed of smaller modular cells, more like what Sams posits. Some of the accompaniments Sondheim employs clearly use the right hand of one schema and the left hand of another. These hybrid accompaniments reflect the idea of a kind of musical genetics, in that some schemata are made up of interchangeable elements.

An example of this is where an arpeggiation schema in the bass may be combined with an oscillating schema in the treble. This is showcased in m. 37 of “Children and Art,” from *Sunday in the Park with George*. Also, In m. 25 of “Forty Days,” from *Passion*, Sondheim combines a triad arpeggiation with a simplified waltz texture. The waltz schema is contained within the bass staff, with the registrally distinct beat one versus beats two and three. There is only one voice rather than a chord in the bass on these last two beats, but the register change itself, along with the three-beat meter, implies a waltz. The treble arpeggiates a simple triad over the first two beats. Since the arpeggiation happens quickly at the beginning of the measure, it is as though the schema are trading places with each other on the second beat, in a sort of accompanimental

dance. Sondheim uses such combinations of patterns to add new types of accompaniments to his musical vocabulary.

Tempo in Accompaniment

A change of tempo of any of the above exemplars may drastically change the character of the schema. However, a tempo change is a difference in degree in its relationship to the schema, rather than a difference in type. As long as the distinguishing features of the schema remain in place, tempo changes are not enough to make it an entirely new schema. The journeying type again shows its flexibility here. In mm. 20-21 of “Sunday,” from *Sunday in the Park with George*, there is a very slow journeying pattern, depicting the characters walking to their places in the painting. Conversely, “Ever After,” from *Into the Woods*, features a quick journeying pattern with an eighth note subdivision in m. 7, marked “Allegretto Giocoso.” This tempo difference evokes much faster motion, but it is still essentially a schema that characterizes motion.

Motivic Accompaniments

Motivic accompaniments are common, especially in Sondheim’s later output. Since they can be composed of any number of melodic, harmonic or rhythmic patterns, they cannot be labeled as a schema. They are identifiable by their melodic motives, which typically recur not only within the song but also throughout the musical in melodies, accompaniments, or underscoring. The issue with motivic accompaniments is that they are typically relegated to one particular show, and so do not share distinctive features across Sondheim’s output. However, because this phenomenon occurs in multiple shows, it is still a distinctive, recognizable feature of Sondheim’s style.

An example comes from *Sunday in the Park with George*, in m. 30 of “Color and Light.” In this example, Sondheim is mimicking the idea of painting in a pointillist style. This treble motive is found throughout the show in a wide variety of developed forms, from thicker textures to rhythmic augmentation. In mm. 16-18 of “Finishing the Hat,” from *Sunday in the Park with George*, the texture is thicker, as the motive is heard in dyads, many of them dissonant seconds or fourths.

With a military setting occurring throughout most of *Passion*, Sondheim often uses motives in the accompaniments that are easily associated with the army. Bugle calls in particular are found in abundance, and used in the piano as arpeggiated, root position, major triads in one or both clefs. An example occurs in m. 11 of “Scene 3 (Part 2),” from *Passion*, where consecutive E major and D major triad arpeggiations are found in the treble.

The development of melodic motives is particularly prominent in shows after and including *Sweeney Todd*, making the practice a part of his mature musical style. Stephen Banfield gives a number of examples of these motives throughout *Sweeney Todd*, *Merrily We Roll Along* and *Into the Woods* in *Sondheim’s Broadway Musicals*.

Accompaniment Patterns in Multiple Musicals

Accompaniments affect the sound of Sondheim’s music so intrinsically because they are surface-level musical events. For the listener, melody is probably at the top of the attention range, but accompaniment could well be next. On an early hearing of his musicals, one will likely hear accompaniment patterns that repeat themselves. A theater composer is likely to reuse schemata that are familiar and comfortable. What sets Sondheim’s use of these schemata apart is his particular use of meter, rhythm, textures

and harmonies. Analyzing specific pairs of songs that have similar sounding accompaniments leads to an understanding of how related uses of accompaniments bring forth a pervasive musical style.

One example of this is how mm. 59-60 of “Liaisons,” from *A Little Night Music*, and mm. 1-4 of “Green Finch and Linnet Bird,” from *Sweeney Todd*, share a very similar pattern within a modified release schema. In both numbers, the final release note—which, in both cases, is relative to the treble, not the bass—does not move until the last half of the final beat. Along with the low register, the beat one bass note this schema makes an immediate connection between the two songs, despite the different meters and other textural differences. This surface-level similarity causes the listener to make a stylistic connection between different Sondheim shows.

Motivic development is quite prominent within several of Sondheim’s shows, in particular *Sweeney Todd*, *Merrily We Roll Along*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Into the Woods* and *Passion*. As mentioned previously, motivic schema would be a contradiction in terms, since a schema is a prototype, and a motive is used specifically for one piece. However, there are some motives that Sondheim uses that occur across multiple works.

Measure 22 of “Act One Opening (Part 7),” from *Into the Woods*, and m. 75 of “It’s Hot Up Here,” from *Sunday in the Park with George*, share a similar accompanimental motive. Although it is not exactly the same either rhythmically or harmonically, there are enough features in common that a clear connection can be made between the two. The bass line begins on beat one, and then plays again after beat two, with a half-step chromatic inflection. The specific rhythm and interval are slightly

different from each other, but close enough to provide the connection. This connection is intensified by the journeying chords played on each beat, and that they are in the same meter at a very similar tempo.³⁷

Measures 9-12 of “That Frank,” from *Merrily We Roll Along*, mm. 58-59 or “Me and My Town,” from *Anyone Can Whistle*, share the same bass accompaniment in different keys. The texture and register of the treble chords are also similar in both, despite the first being triadic and the second quartal. The melodic qualities of the treble are similar, in that they share a very similar contour. These melodic, pitch-based factors combined with a similar rhythmic execution bring forth an aural connection between these figures.

(Brightly)

Hi there, Co - ra, What's new? The

Example 2-5. *Anyone Can Whistle*, "Me and My Town," mm. 58-59.

These are a few of the many examples of accompaniment figures that are indicative of Sondheim, and share characteristics across his body of work.

³⁷ Also connecting these examples are the melodic similarities. The melodies have similar contours and are in close register proximity to one another.

Conclusion on Accompaniment

Sondheim uses a variety of traditional Broadway accompaniment schemata, but also stretches these patterns to distinguish his compositional voice from other composers of musical theater. Although categorization and identification of these accompaniment types is useful in seeing the schemata that Sondheim prefers, this alone does not give us a complete picture of Sondheim's style. Besides the distinctly Sondheim types discussed in this chapter, very few of the stock patterns he uses are likely to have never been used before or since by another composer. It is only by identifying other musical parameters within these types that a more extensive theory of his style can be identified.

Chapter 3. Harmony

I'm somebody who believes the heart of music is harmony, as opposed to melody, it's very important for me to have a sense of where the harmonies are going. And the harmonies imply the melody.

—Stephen Sondheim¹

Sondheim expounds on this quotation more as his interviews with Mark Eden Horowitz progress. He makes it clear that he is talking not only about vertical sonorities, but also about chord progression.² This chapter will therefore not only consider the vertical sounds of the harmonies Sondheim uses, but also the ways in which he deals with chord progression and tonality and how they are all idiomatic of his style.

As discussed at the beginning of the second chapter, his use of harmony is often directly related to how he uses accompaniment.³ The accompaniment schemata contain chords and progressions that work together to evoke drama, and become the basis of the song.

Like many composers and theorists, Sondheim believes that melody flows out of a harmonic foundation. After figuring out the accompaniment pattern he will use, he often begins to work out the harmonic structure of a song. In the composer's own opinion, the harmonic line is what gives music distinction.⁴ This chapter's epigraph

¹ Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 10.

² Ibid., 198.

³ See particularly Sondheim's quotation from page 203 of Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decision*. This quotation gives an indication of how difficult it is to separate specific musical elements in Sondheim's work. Harmony may be composed in his head, but it is worked out at the piano, like the accompaniment.

⁴ See Herbert, "Sondheim's Technique."

reveals a compositional process contrary to that of most Broadway songwriters, who typically compose the melody first and then create a harmonization. In an interview with Steve Swayne, Sondheim again explains his preference for harmony over melody: “I’m accused so often of not having melodic gifts, but I *like* the music I write. Harmony gives music its life, its emotional color, [even] more than rhythm.”⁵ Harmonic language, combined with and apart from the previous inferences on accompaniment and dramatic concerns, is pivotal in showing how Sondheim’s musical voice is distinct, because he uses harmony in different ways than his predecessors and his peers.

In a *New York Times* review, Martin Gottfried classified Sondheim as set apart from his contemporaries because of his “inner voices, his fresh turns of harmony, ... and surprising resolutions.”⁶ The ways in which Sondheim presents his harmonies are important to one’s ability to recognize them. Chordal texture—which is produced by such factors as chordal density, register, inversion (intervals above the bass) and chordal spacing (intervals between registrally adjacent pitches)—affects sound and compositional style. Orchestrators may even make decisions on what instrument plays where based on how a chord is spaced and approached in Sondheim’s piano/vocal score. Such decisions may carry over from song to song, and show to show. This also makes Sondheim’s music more recognizable, regardless of whether or not the orchestrator involved remains the same.⁷ Harmony and texture are primary contributors to the sound of Sondheim’s accompaniment schemata.

⁵Swayne, *How Sondheim Found His Sound*, 128.

⁶Zadan, *Sondheim & Co*, 146.

As stated previously, Sondheim generally begins composing with an accompaniment, and then works out the harmony within that accompaniment. These, along with melody, are the primary musical elements that are most indicative of his compositional voice. Although each of these musical elements are considered separately, it is unlikely for Sondheim, or any other composer for that matter, to simply isolate one musical element at a time apart from the others.

When considering a harmonic analysis, the first issue is deciding what exactly *is* a harmonic sonority in Sondheim's music. This depends on a number of factors that primarily deal with texture, rhythm and meter—factors that are primarily the province of accompaniment schemata. One must determine whether such textures lead to an understanding of the sonority as primarily a vertical or horizontal combination.

On one side of the spectrum lie the more linear accompaniment textures, in which one is often hard-pressed to take a group of notes and call them a particular chord or pitch collection. Certain accompaniment schemata are stretched out over time, which requires an assembly of a whole out of parts. Simple examples of this would be the waltz and the boom-chick, in which the bass and treble lines are separated, but typically perceived as a single harmony. What is more pertinent here is the use of patterns that are more difficult to unify, such as the developing accompaniment patterns, where individual lines make sense on their own, but are difficult to group with the other lines. Example 3-1a shows a typical accompaniment of vertical harmonies, where example 3-1b shows a more linear harmonic accompaniment. In 3-1a there is a simultaneous, rhythmic attack of all the notes in each chord of the accompaniment, creating a homophonic texture. It is

⁷ Despite the orchestrator, the combination of accompaniment, harmony and melody within Sondheim's treatment of drama cause it to still sound like Sondheim.

easy to hear them as a single collection of pitches and they can clearly be labeled this way. This is not the case in 3-1b. The notes are more spread out rhythmically over the entire measure. There are two separate, linear musical lines in the treble accompaniment that are dissonant with the bass pedal for the majority of the two-measure segment. It is difficult to hear this as a single chord, rather than as more individual musical events.

a. Vertical harmony. *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, “Free,” mm. 20-23.

(Tempo (Moderately- In 4))

see me as a Ro-man with my head un bowed?(Sing it good and loud) Free! Like a

p *mf*

b. Linear harmony. *Pacific Overtures*, “Chrysanthemum Tea,” mm. 10-12.

Example 3-1. Vertical harmony versus linear harmony.

3-1a and 3-1b are extreme examples of linear and vertical harmony. In actual practice, Sondheim is likely to use accompaniments that incorporate aspects of both vertical and linear writing. However, it is clear from his statements and his sketches that his study of linear writing with Milton Babbitt influences his musical thinking:

[Babbitt] was showing me the long-line structures of [Mozart’s Symphony No. 39] and how it reflected itself in the shorter sections, and even in the little melodic motifs. That’s what holds the piece together.⁸

⁸ Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 135.

Because linear textures permeate so much of his musical output, especially as his works matured, it is difficult to reduce any of his songs to a typical lead sheet of block harmonies.⁹ His use of harmony does distinguish itself, even in more linear textures, but it is important to also consider how Sondheim's linear writing affects his perceived harmonic language.

As exemplified in Mark Eden Horowitz's interviews, Sondheim maps out many of his more ambitious musical numbers both harmonically and contrapuntally in what he calls "long line composition."¹⁰ In these sketches, he uses chord symbols and Roman numerals to show himself harmonic goals in a very tonal idiom.

Figure 3-1. Sondheim's long line sketch of *Passion*, "Fosca's Entrance."

⁹ Swayne, *How Sondheim Found His Sound*, 30.

¹⁰ Long line composition is discussed throughout Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*.

Figure 3-1 is a long line sketch of “Fosca’s Entrance” from *Passion*.¹¹ The small words above the staff are lyric cues that correspond to the melody. It is unclear if this pertains to only part one of “Fosca’s Entrance,” or if it is both parts one and two. The lyric clues end towards the end of part one, so it is likely to only encompass that part. Many of the chords and much of the counterpoint that is sketched here did not make it to the final score. Instead, this must have been an early draft sketch that gave him a blueprint for how he might work out this protracted number.

Sondheim admits that certain songs are worked out in greater detail, and that in his later works this detail is even more apparent. This sketch shows how Sondheim would plan out larger songs and musicals scenes contrapuntally to make sure he reached certain harmonic pillars.¹² Sondheim clearly sees a link between harmony and counterpoint: “If I’m writing extended passages...the glue has to be harmonic and has to be spinning out the triad and spinning out the harmony.”¹³ His use of the words “spinning out,” along with his long line sketches, implies the composing out of harmonies. Many of Sondheim’s sketches for his songs contain an outline of harmonic and contrapuntal structures, showing where he wants the song to progress. He refers to this as the long line, which is essentially a contrapuntal background with some harmonic ideas included in the form of chord symbols and Roman numerals. Sondheim defines his idea of long

¹¹ This is Horowitz’s figure 1.12.

¹² There is no written evidence that Sondheim ever studied Schenker’s theories, but there are striking similarities in his long line sketches. He says that he learned how to plan out songs from his studies with Milton Babbitt, who—at the time—was a proponent of Schenker’s theories.

¹³ Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 6.

line composition as a contrapuntally sound melody-bass framework.¹⁴ The interaction between separate musical lines is important to Sondheim's style, and is essential to how he plans out large-scale musical scenes.

When considering the other side of the harmonic spectrum, one deals primarily with vertical chords, where the triad, seventh chord, ninth chord, etc., is the harmonic construct. Sondheim's "usual" choice is five- and six-note chords.¹⁵ Beyond this indication of preference for ninth and eleventh chords, he gives no indication of preference for chord qualities or pitch content. In practice, Sondheim uses a wide variety of chord qualities in an extended tertian, tonal idiom, but he uses particular vertical harmonies to create a dramatic effect in his musicals.

Along with identifying idiomatic uses of linear and vertical harmonies, an important aspect of Sondheim's harmonic language is how he handles harmonic progressions, which combine aspects of the vertical and horizontal. When discussing what identifies any composer's style, Sondheim claims that "it's not just one chord or chordal progression, but there are accompaniment figures, registers and all that that distinguish Brahms and Beethoven."¹⁶ This not only suggests that accompaniment is a significant factor in understanding style, but also proves that Sondheim himself sees the use of harmony and harmonic progression as a major factor in distinguishing musical style.

¹⁴ Ibid., 17.

¹⁵ Ibid., 43.

¹⁶ Ibid., 198.

In order to identify Sondheim's harmonic language, one can parse aspects of his musical language according to the above distinctions: how harmony is used linearly, particularly in accompaniment schemata; and dramatically striking and recognizable vertical sonorities called "effect harmonies" that show similarities in construction in some of Sondheim's most distinctive chords from each musical. Also important is his intriguing use of harmonic progression, and how harmony and tonality affect drama in Sondheim's musicals.

Harmony and Texture in Accompaniment

Among other things, musical texture concerns itself with how many musical events are happening in a given moment. When dealing with harmony in a particular accompaniment, the texture dramatically affects how we understand a particular sonority. Sondheim often uses rhythm and meter to help create textural differences that affect the way audiences perceive harmony. This creates an ambiguity that makes it difficult to label his harmonies with a particular commercial chord symbol or Roman numeral. A prime example of this comes from mm. 1-3 of "Act One Opening (Part 1)," from *Into the Woods*.

"Act One Opening (Part 1)" opens the show and is therefore without any other tonal context—the ambiguity presents itself in whether one hears the opening D-A fifth in the bass as part of the following C-E-G-B treble sonority, or as something separate. The vertical dissonance that would occur if the events were stacked on top of each other is stretched over time so that the events occur separately. Therefore the dissonance is no longer vertical but rather diagonal, in that they are happening at different times rhythmically and in different voices. As a D¹³ chord, it would be a dissonant, extended

tertian sonority, but instead it occurs as a thirdless D triad followed by a CMAJ7. The pitch classes (GABCDE) have the potential to contain up to five intervals of a second. The way in which Sondheim chooses to voice these pitches completely avoids any direct seconds. The only dissonant interval of the pitches in the CMAJ7 is the B-C second, and it is converted into a seventh, which gives space and causes less direct dissonance than a second would.

Certain musical parameters separate the treble and bass into distinct units. Rhythmically, the D-A is shorter; dynamically, it is louder. It is also stressed with an accent, as opposed to the staccato tetrachord in the treble. In terms of register, more than an octave separates them. However, the tempo of this piece and the opening meter do create a fusion of the units. They follow each other so closely that it is hard to hear the CMAJ7 without the bass D influencing the sound. In m. 7, the two are heard simultaneously, erasing the effect of the separation that was initially present.

The ways in which Sondheim displaces the two, especially in terms of rhythm, is important to understanding how he approaches harmony. It creates a sense of tonal ambiguity, in that the listener is unsure of tonal function and progression. The ear may hear this as a single, displaced sonority or a progression of one chord to another. The dissonance comes through a diagonal dimension, rather than a vertical one.

It is not until the right hand harmony changes at m. 8 to a Bmin7 chord that any other harmonic or tonal clue is given. There is an F \sharp present, which gives the listener a clue to the written key of G major. Without more functional context, it is impossible to know whether or not it is tonal or modal. The most likely choices of key without a score

is D Mixolydian because of the initial open fifth and regularity of the D-E melodic motive. Another possibility is E natural minor, because the E in the D-E melodic is stressed more. There are further uses of chromaticism and changes of key in the score that continue to make all of “Act One Opening (Part 1)” tonally ambiguous, with no clear functional progressions. It is not until part two that there is finally a sense of tonal stability.

According to the key signature of G major, if it is a single verticality—a D¹³—then it is a combination of dominant and predominant function in the key of G, or what Kevin Swinden calls “plural function,” where the dominant and subdominant functions are competing within the same sonority.¹⁷

The distinction in the *Into the Woods* example between treble and bass leads to one of Sondheim’s musical trademarks, where the left and right hand of an accompaniment are doing different things that are conceptually dissonant, and yet are working together rhythmically in direct consonant—or at least less dissonant—intervals. Sondheim comments on one instance in which this is happening in *Passion*: “I put a dissonant accompaniment in the left hand, but I kept the bugle idea in the right hand.”¹⁸ Measure 13 of “Happiness (Part 1),” from *Passion*, shows one instance of this kind of juxtaposition.

Because of the cross-relations between D \sharp and D \flat , there is another diagonal dissonance between the lines. The contradiction is emphasized with the initial interval of

¹⁷ See Kevin Swinden, “When Functions Collide: Aspects of Plural Function in Chromatic Music,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 27, no. 2 (Fall 2005).

¹⁸ Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 5.

a major second, creating a harsh dissonance at the start, but de-emphasizing the other potential clashes through vertical consonances. Sondheim may have conceived this through dissonant counterpoint. He begins the line with the dissonant major second, breaking rules of traditional counterpoint because he does not begin with a consonant interval.

Another way it may have been conceived is as two different harmonic ideas being juxtaposed. Sondheim claims, “My favorite chord...[is] the kind of chord in which you take a triad and lay on top of it another triad and it’s all within the same key.”¹⁹ In the example, the bugle is clearly used as a B \flat major triad arpeggiation in the treble. Against this can be heard an ambiguous arpeggiation of a D \flat triad with suspended fourth.

Not only does he do this with triads, but more often he will have the left hand implying something harmonically different than what is happening in the right hand. Juxtaposition of left and right hand events is often used to create ambiguous harmonic events that are typical of Sondheim. “Come Play Wiz Me,” from *Anyone Can Whistle*, showcases this right and left hand juxtaposition in mm. 5-8.

(Light Fox-trot)

Example 3-2. *Anyone Can Whistle*, “Come Play Wiz Me,” mm. 5-8.

¹⁹ Ibid., 29.

The left hand contains a clear tonic prolongation through this sub-phrase, with the C3 pedal holding through. The bass line adds variety with the A2 to G1 leap in m. 6. The right hand, however, is on a different tonal trajectory, beginning with a B minor triad. The F# octave contradicts the tonic in the bass as the tritone above C. This causes tonal ambiguity because the tritone cannot be considered any part of the C major or minor system. The tension is eased slightly as the F# octave moves to G4 and F#3 in m. 6, but the thickness of the treble texture, along with the melodic motive ending on the leading tone, keeps the harmony in a state of uncertainty. The tension could be released a bit at the end of m. 8, as the melody arrives on tonic. However, the treble chord moves into a low register, being only a second above the pedal C3, with the ninth, eleventh and thirteenth of the chord in closed position. This many pitches in such close proximity in such a low register cause a muddy sound. The G1 bass forces this harmony to gravitate toward dominant, usurping any tonic stability the melody might have provided.

In mm. 55-56 of the “Opening,” from *Assassins*, the accompaniment provides another instance of harmonic displacement. The beginning of this release schema starts the first juxtaposition. In m. 55, the dissonant D4 resolves as expected in the right hand to C4. However, at that point the bass moves to G, which is a common tonic to dominant motion used in a variety of accompaniment schemata. The resolution of the dissonant D—being a ninth above the bass C—in the right hand becomes a new dissonance, C—a fourth above the bass G—at the point of expected resolution on beat three. The new dissonance is an unstable six-four harmony. By frustrating the expected resolution,

through making the note of resolution a new dissonance, the musical intensity is sustained further throughout the phrase.

The conflict continues in m. 56 of the example. The harmony from m. 55 is repeated at first, this time with a proper resolution over a C bass. For this to happen, the rhythm of the left hand speeds up so that the hands match each other. The second half of beat three provides an unexpected, rich dissonance. This could be an A minor triad with added second, having a predominant or tonic function. Beat four moves to the dominant G in the bass, which is where beat three was expected to go. Predominant function remains in the treble, almost as if the treble voice switched beats three and four. The B gives a clear sense of dominant function, especially if it were over the G bass. The E could be part of that as well, since mediant chords are sometimes used as dominant substitutes, which can be seen in other Sondheim songs.²⁰ The A and C in the treble on beat four could work together to express predominant function, and so “should” have taken place over the A bass, with a clearer predominant to dominant progression, as shown in the recomposition in figure 3-2. The recomposition “corrects” the misplaced right and left hands as though the right hand in the second half of m. 56 in the original example got off by a step. In the actual piece there is a functional collision between bass and treble, and yet the bass voice triumphs in progressing the harmony toward a more tonal harmonic progression even if the treble contradicts it.

²⁰ One example is “Barcelona” from *Company*. The song opens with a vamp that sounds like tonic to dominant function, in which the dominant-functioning chord is a mediant.



Figure 3-2. Recomposition of *Assassins*, “Opening,” mm. 55-56.

Other instances of this “wrong note” effect happen throughout Sondheim’s music.²¹ In m. 7 of “Pirelli’s Miracle Elixir,” from *Sweeney Todd*, the right and left hands being at odds with each other disrupt a seemingly typical progression. The beat-one E4 bass makes little sense, since the chord would have to be a fourth inversion D9. The D bass on beat two also creates an awkward inversion in the line, as the seventh of the E chord, which would be a $V \frac{4}{2}$ chord in the key of A. Traditionally, a third inversion dominant seventh chord resolves to a first inversion tonic, but this one cycles back to the inverted D9. If only they were switched, they would make complete sense as the roots of their respective chords. However, with the addition of the melody line—which Sondheim claims typically comes from the harmony—the E bass does not sound nearly as out of place, since it acts as consonant support for the first two pitches in the melody. In fact, the melody adds to the ambiguity, in that it outlines an A major triad against the D major treble on the first beat.

²¹ The use of “wrong note” has its roots in Prokofiev scholarship. Deborah Rifkin lists a number of scholars who have used this term in describing Prokofiev’s harmonies (See Deborah Rifkin, “A Theory of Motives for Prokofiev’s Music,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 26, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 265. Steve Swayne, in particular, has shown evidence for Prokofiev’s influence on Sondheim, so it is appropriate that there is a connection between scholarship for both composers. However, in agreement with Rifkin, it is unfortunate that such a term is used. If the composer wants that sound, then it is clearly not a wrong note.

This is an example of Sondheim layering two triads on top of each other, each being in the same key, which effectively creates a diatonic ninth chord.²² The second beat matches the E minor arpeggiation of the treble, but is also dissonant with the bass. As for the diagonals, the collection (E \sharp AC \sharp D) across the melody and accompaniment of beat one contains three possible seconds, with only one, E-F \sharp , being played. The second occurs on the attack of beat one, just like the *Passion* example. This causes an initial dissonance, but with the effect of that dissonance being lessened through the rest of the vertical intervals.

Many of Sondheim's accompaniments are not simple verticalities, but rather sonorities that grow and change over time as developing accompaniments, as discussed in the second chapter. A particular pattern might begin simply, and then evolve into something more complicated. Harmony often follows this development, in that it gets thicker and more spread out, and becomes very complicated and difficult to understand as any kind of verticality.

In "Sunday in the Park with George," from *Sunday in the Park with George*, the harmony quickly develops over a period of eleven measures. Measure 3 begins with a boom-chick (or um-pah) that indicates an F \sharp min (\sharp 7) chord in a possible waltz or boom-chick accompaniment. By m. 9 the harmonic construct becomes thicker. The chord has changed to a C root, with an F \sharp tritone in the treble, increasing dissonance as well as adding an extra pitch to increase texture. An additional motion to G and F \sharp in the bass at the end of the measure increases the texture as well. This texture thickens even more so

²² Although Sondheim claims that Aaron Copland's influence on him is minimal, this example in particular is quite evocative of Copland.

by m. 11, with more notes and a larger span of register. An added F \sharp 5 in the treble increases the dissonance as it conflicts with the F \sharp 4. Additional motion in the bass emphasizes the cross-relations. The thickening texture is culminated in m. 13, which contains every pitch class in a two-flat key signature. Because of how this chord was preceded, and because of the metric and registral position of the F, this measure makes sense as an F-rooted harmony. Sondheim eases the listener into this extremely dense sonority through an additive process.

Sondheim primarily uses accompanimental harmony in a linear way, using rhythmic juxtaposition, diagonal dissonance and dissonant counterpoint. Through such methods as these, he often takes accompanimental harmony to the limits of tonality.

Harmony through Counterpoint

Counterpoint is essentially a combination of melodic lines, which act as voices independent of one another, yet still bound to working together to create a simultaneity of sound. Allen Forte discusses the use of counterpoint in creating added-note harmonies in ballads of early twentieth-century American popular song:

It is important to notice that these added notes are stepwise displacements of normative chordal elements. That is, they are *melodic* in origin and result from the voice-leading strands that are unfolding dynamically in the music.²³

Sondheim uses linear techniques and displacement to create not only extended tertian sonorities, but also other non-traditional harmonic constructs in the accompaniment and vocal harmonies. Swayne rightly insists that Sondheim's songs cannot simply be reduced

²³ Allen Forte, *The American Popular Ballad of the Golden Era, 1924-1950* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 8.

to lead sheets, meaning a melody line with a chord symbol—either Roman numeral or commercial chord symbol—above or below. He claims instead that Sondheim’s harmony is a product of counterpoint.²⁴ Other analysts of Sondheim offer this notion of his underlying counterpoint, which certainly stems from Sondheim’s own comments on the subject. Most of Sondheim’s harmonies are difficult to analyze using chord symbols, but many can be better understood through the ways independent lines come together.

When it does not make sense to label conflicting staves of accompaniment as a vertical sonority, it might make more sense to see it as a contrapuntal combination. A particular aspect of Sondheim’s harmonic language is the use of dissonant contrapuntal lines to create harmonies. This can occur within the accompaniment, between melody and accompaniment, or between two or more voices. Accompaniments such as the one from the beginning of “Pirelli’s Miracle Elixir,” from *Sweeney Todd*, make more sense when considered as independently moving lines that work together to make a particular sound.

Stephen Banfield has observed how Sondheim uses this process in the lead-in music to the song “Sunday” in *Sunday in the Park with George* (mm. 19-20).²⁵ The upper line traverses a diatonic line, C-B \flat -A-G. The lower line is moving upward chromatically at the same time, A \flat -A-B \flat -(B). The A \flat -C on the second half of beat one in m. 19 travel an almost complete chromatic wedge until their lines resolve into a G9 chord in m. 20. The initial A \flat -C consonance gives way to two consecutive, harsh dissonances.

²⁴ Swayne, *How Sondheim Found His Sound*, 30.

²⁵ Banfield, *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals*, 354-55.

The A and B \flat trade places to become B \flat -A. The bareness of these dissonant intervals is accentuated through their doublings at the octave.

The lines occur again at the end of the number in mm. 73-75. In this example, the pitch class resolution of the final interval is made clearer, with the upper line moving from A to G, and the bottom line moving from B \flat to B \natural . Sondheim uses the contrapuntal motion of these examples to compose out a period of time between the arpeggiated G major triad and the vertical G major triad at both the beginning and ending of this piece. This dissonant counterpoint creates more tension than a vertical, triadic progression would, allowing the eventual resolution to be that much sweeter.

Harmony, as an identifying factor of Sondheim's musical style, is not just limited to the accompaniment. The ways in which he uses vocal harmony and counterpoint between voice and accompaniment and between multiple voices are also important. As with many Broadway composers, vocal harmony is relatively infrequent in most of Sondheim's work, compared to his use of single line melodies. An obvious reason for this is Sondheim's attention to dramatic concerns. Like the argument against highly contrapuntal work in late medieval church music, the same type of argument could be made against using vocal counterpoint or thick vocal harmony in a theater work—the music obstructs the message of the text. Ensemble numbers, where several characters are singing different melodic lines at once, are especially rare in Sondheim's work.

"No More," from *Into the Woods*, begins with an introductory back and forth between the Baker and his father, the Mysterious Man. The Baker confronts his father for leaving his family, and must ultimately decide as to whether he is going to take the same

course of action. The two realize just how similar they are and sing the line “like father, like son” together in mm. 112-113, as a lead-in to the Baker’s dramatic finish of the song. The harmony works in inversion much like the instrumental harmony in “Sunday.” In this example, Sondheim uses an exact inversion of the first three notes to create the harmonies between the Baker and the Mysterious Man. The lines begin on B^b and take opposite routes through major seconds, before coming to unison on E^b and splitting into thirds at the end of the line to achieve their melodic goals. The inversion travelling in exact intervals may represent their similarities as father and son in parallel dramatic situations. However, it also shows their differences in that the Baker chooses to stay and raise his child, unlike his father who abandoned him.

There are times that Sondheim uses thicker vocal textures for dramatic effect.

Sondheim has stated that he focused on developing his skills in vocal counterpoint in *A*

Little Night Music:

In those days I was just getting into contrapuntal vocal and choral writing...and I wanted to develop my technique by writing a trio. What I *didn't* want to do is the *quodlibet* method, where you hear one tune, and then you hear another, and you know they're going to go together, and to your dismay they do. I thought, wouldn't it be nice to have three songs you *don't* think are going to go together, and they *do* go together. So I used a harmonic progression that's disguised enough...the trick was the little vamp on “Soon” which has five- and six-note chords in it...²⁶

Measures 100-103 of the “Soon” trio may not be a *quodlibet*, however, it does use basic melodic ideas and excerpts of lyrics from the solo numbers “Now,” “Later,” and “Soon.”²⁷ Of particular interest is his use of dissonant counterpoint between the vocal

²⁶ Sondheim, "Q&A with Sondheim Pt. 2," 12.

lines on the third beat of m. 102 and the third beat of m. 103. In m. 102, he uses the accompaniment to encompass the entire harmony. The D root in m. 102 holds together an eleventh chord, where two of the voice parts (C \sharp and G) are dissonant with the bass, but part of the extended tertian sonority doubled in the treble. The last beat of m. 103 provides no support for the eleventh of the chord (D). In the lowest voice, from m. 102 to m. 103, the D follows the C \sharp easily as a linear line, but creates dissonant counterpoint with the rest of the chord on the beat. This creates a dense harmonic color through the use of counterpoint.

These skills would no doubt seep into his future musicals, which is where most of his contrapuntal lines are made apparent. When he is using dissonant, contrapuntal vocal harmony, he often uses lines that work together homophonically so that the text can be clearly heard. They are still independent enough to be considered counterpoint rather than a simple harmonization, but they work together very smoothly.

In mm. 76-80 of “A Little Priest,” from *Sweeney Todd*, Sweeney and Mrs. Lovett sing two lines that are homorhythmic, with Sweeney’s line featuring the melody. Mrs. Lovett’s line of harmony features a number of fourths above the melody, and ends a major second above Sweeney’s. The line is not indicative of a simple harmonization of the melody line; rather it looks more like its own line because of the fourths and the second, and the dissonance of the intervals causes them to compete with each other. The bass harmony in the accompaniment in m. 80 is dominant in function. Mrs. Lovett’s line

²⁷ Although not a true *quodlibet*, this number does resemble a more traditional Broadway counterpoint song. These are notably found in a number of Irving Berlin tunes, such as “An Old-Fashioned Wedding.”

gravitates toward this dominant, ending on $\hat{2}$. Sweeney sings a strong tonic ending with $\hat{8}$ - $\hat{7}$ - $\hat{8}$, conflicting with both Mrs. Lovett's line and the bass harmony and function.

Figure 3-3 shows a recomposition of mm. 76-80. To make the counterpoint more normative, the C on beat two of m. 79 in Mrs. Lovett's part has been removed. This shifts the next two beats over by one beat, and now Mrs. Lovett's melodic goal is the same as Sweeney's. The C of m. 79 thus became a registral displacement, being out of place for a normative melodic descent to tonic, and crossing under Todd's Eb. Sondheim's voice rings clear in the alteration of this normative counterpoint, ending the vocal lines on a striking major second.

(♩. = 66)
(MRS. LOVETT:) *f*

Then who are we to de - ny it in here?

(TODD:)

dear, And who are we to de - ny it in here?

(V) (I)

Figure 3-3. Recomposition of *Sweeney Todd*, “A Little Priest,” mm. 76-80.

The independence of individual lines has an enormous effect on Sondheim's harmonic language. As seen in the examples, it is mostly achieved through rhythmic displacement, layering of harmonies on top of each other, and dissonant counterpoint.

Vertical Harmony: Effect Harmony

Although many of Sondheim's harmonic and accompanimental textures are created through linear writing, an important part of his harmonic language is vertical. Sondheim "know[s] there are certain chords I write over and over again."²⁸ In discussing his use of harmony, he is likely speaking about the use of certain extended tertian chords that appear often throughout his work. He talks about his "usual five- and six-note chords," and his scores do contain many extended harmonies—especially ninth and eleventh chords.²⁹ However, the use of these types of chords is not something particular to Sondheim. What is more particular is his use of singular verticalities that are used in isolation, rather than progression, for some kind of musico-dramatic effect. These chords create for themselves distinctive associations because of their dramatic context.

These "effect harmonies" are unusual for musical theater composers, but do have historical context in Western classical music. Ernst Kurth was one theorist who talked about the "absolute effect" of both harmonic progression and individual harmonies.³⁰ Kurth cited Richard Strauss's *Salome* and *Elektra* as well as Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* for using absolute harmonic effect. Individual effect harmony became even more common in dramatic works in later nineteenth- and early twentieth-century dramatic works. Igor Stravinsky's use of effect harmonies in his dramatic works is especially pertinent. Music history students learn about such idiomatic chords as Stravinsky's "Rite chord" from *The Rite of Spring*, and the "Petrushka chord" from

²⁸ Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 49.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁰ Ernst Kurth, *Ernst Kurth: Selected Writings*, ed. Lee A. Rothfarb, trans. Lee A. Rothfarb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 125-129.

Petrushka. These chords have distinctive associations with the dramatic context of these musical works.

a. “Petrushka Chord,” from *Petrushka*, 2nd Tableau, mm. 9-10.

49

Molto meno $\text{♩} = 50$

Cl. I

Cl. II

p

*Parts transposed to concert pitch

b. “Rite chord,” from *The Rite of Spring*, Dance of the Young Girls, rehearsal 13.

13

Tempo giusto $\text{♩} = 50$

arco (non div.)

V-n I II

V-le

V-c.

C-b.

f

Figure 3-4. Stravinsky effect harmonies.

Sondheim uses effect harmonies as a regular part of his musical style. Especially in his later works, there are chords that are used as musical signifiers for dramatic moments. Even though these chords are written in a variety of qualities and textures, there are certain similarities that make them part of Sondheim’s style. Almost every

chord begins a song; they all occur in a strong position in terms of the musical phrase; much attention is given to these chords through metric position and length of time they are heard. Most importantly, in each case they are used as musical signifiers for something important dramatically. By arranging them according to their likenesses, one can hear pertinent connections across Sondheim's work through the use of these chords.

Because of the regular use of pastiche numbers throughout *Follies*, it would seem unlikely that the show would contain any effect harmonies. Sondheim still allows his voice to shine through in a few numbers in particular. In "Waiting for the Girls Upstairs," he begins the number with a held chord, signifying Buddy and Ben's nostalgic remembrance of their days calling upon the Follies girls. This chord will be called the "Nostalgia chord" (02479) because of its use to propel the men into the past that is later revealed to be viewed through rose-colored glasses.



Figure 3-5. "Nostalgia chord," *Follies*, "Waiting for the Girls Upstairs," m. 1.

Written shortly after *Follies*, *A Little Night Music* introduces an effect chord that also pertains to memory. The *Liebeslieder* singers are portraying Fredrik and Désirée's past relationship through the song "Remember?," which begins with the "Memory chord." These chords also share the same pitch class content (02479) and are arranged

with similar placement in terms of register.³¹ The bottom interval is a perfect fourth in both cases, and the top intervals are consecutive thirds. The dramatic context of stirring up memories in both cases solidifies the connection between these chords in these dramatically different shows.



Figure 3-6. “Memory chord,” *A Little Night Music*, “Remember,” mm. a-b.

The next group of effect harmonies contains a prominent half step at the bottom of the stack. This use of harsh dissonance and instability causes these chords to stand out at the beginning of a piece as something special. The dramatic change in *Pacific Overtures* involves the gradual Westernization of Japan over time. This is reflected musically, and so one would expect the more idiomatic Sondheim chords to appear later in the musical. However, the use of “Haiku chords” is found within the first number, “The Advantages of Floating in the Middle of the Sea.” A chord is played before each block of text.³² The abstract voice leading from chord to chord connects the first and third chords very easily to each other, through a neighbor-like motion. The second chord in the series is also (02479), sharing the same pitch collection with the “Nostalgia chord” and

³¹ This chord is both the same pc-set and similar in voicing to Bill Evans’s “So What?” chord. Evans, having been born in 1929, was only a year older than Sondheim, making them direct contemporaries, albeit in different popular music genres.

³² Although these text blocks do not follow the actual requirements of five-seven-five syllable lines of Haiku, it is assumed that these moments are meant to reflect the poems.

the “Memory” chord. It also uses all the pitches of the pentatonic scale, which is a major compositional device in *Pacific Overtures* used to evoke Japanese music.

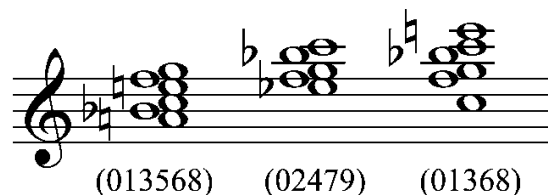


Figure 3-7. “Haiku chords,” *Pacific Overtures*, “The Advantages of Floating in the Middle of the Sea,” mm. 146-148, (013568), (02479), (01368).

Although effect harmonies are more prevalent in his more mature works, an example of one can be found as early as *Company*. After the brief overture, the show begins with the sound of a busy signal. This is then “transcribed” musically in the “Busy Signal chord” (0347), which is heard a number of times throughout the show. There is even a joke in one scene of dialogue about the pulse of New York City being a busy signal, which ties into the musico-dramatic implications of this chord.

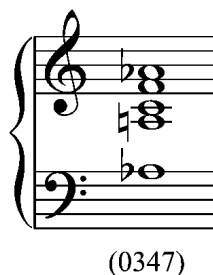


Figure 3-8. “Busy Signal chord,” *Company*, “Company,” m. 3.

Sweeney Todd features two particularly prominent effect harmonies. The first is the “Idea chord” (015), from the beginning of “A Little Priest.” This chord signifies Mrs. Lovett’s initial idea of using the murdered Pirelli’s body as filling for her meat pies. It is

the significant dramatic turn of the first act, and therefore holds particular importance in the narrative.



Figure 3-9. “Idea chord,” *Sweeney Todd*, “A Little Priest,” mm. 1-3.

A second example from *Sweeney Todd* occurs in Judge Turpin’s “Johanna.” Judge Turpin is struggling with his sexual desire for his ward. The “Lust chord” (0148) signifies the tension as he is both praying but also peering through Johanna’s keyhole.



Figure 3-10. “Lust chord,” *Sweeney Todd*, “Johanna (Judge Turpin),” m. 1.

The “Window chord” (01568) occurs at the end of the verse sections of “Finishing the Hat” in *Sunday in the Park with George*. Even though the “Window chord” does not open a musical moment, it is very significant to dramatic function. It occurs when Georges Seurat is reflecting on his lack of ability to connect with the world. He is looking out at the people of the world as if through a window, where he can see them, but not connect with them personally.



**Figure 3-11. “Window chord,” *Sunday in the Park with George*,
“Finishing the Hat,” m. 41.**

In the first act of *Into the Woods*, Little Red Riding Hood escapes from the belly of the Wolf and begins to reflect on what she has learned from the experience when the “Wisdom chord” (0135) is heard in the opening to “I Know Things Now.”



Figure 3-12. “Wisdom chord,” *Into the Woods*, “I Know Things Now,” m. 3.

Also in *Into the Woods*, Jack makes a big entrance after the “First Midnight” song, where the “Giant chord” (0158) interrupts the cadence. It announces his big discovery of this new and amazing place as his feature number, “Giants in the Sky,” begins.



Figure 3-13. “Giant chord,” *Into the Woods*, “Giants in the Sky,” mm. 1-2.

The next two effect harmonies are the most set apart in terms of content, but still remain fixed as harmonic signifiers for dramatic events. In *Assassins*, the “Gun chord” is heard three times in the show when a gunshot is fired at a president. This chord holds particular significance in that it helps to unify the show musically. Most of the songs are historically based in terms of musical style, and so have little to do with each other stylistically. This chord helps to unite the characters in their singular purpose to exercise their voice by shooting a president. Even though the “Gun chord” does not contain a dissonance in its first interval (a perfect fifth), it does share qualities with earlier chords. This chord is in the same set class (0158) as the “Giant chord.” Both chords represent a shocking incident. Jack is wildly excited about the shock of discovering a huge beanstalk and a wealthy kingdom of giants, and can hardly wait to relay his story. The “Gun chord” epitomizes the shock energy, noise and pain felt by a fired weapon, and also the anguish of those affected by someone who has been shot. Despite the different inversion, the minor second remains prominent within the “Gun chord,” drawing attention to the dissonance created by that interval. There is also a relationship between these and the “Idea chord” (015), which is a subset of the “Giant chord” and “Gun chord,” (0158). Similarly, Mrs. Lovett has the shocking idea of using people as filling for meat pies. The shock of the murder that is to come is packed into this chord. These chords are also a subset of the “Window chord” (01568), and related by the subset (015) to the “Wisdom chord,” showing that many of these effect harmonies have very similar pitch class content.

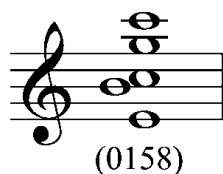


Figure 3-14. “Gun chord,” *Assassins*, “Unworthy of Your Love, 6b,” m. 6.

The opening of *Passion* features the lovers Giorgio and Clara in bed together, and the “Lovers chord” (02458) plays to indicate the sexual climax. Like the other effect harmonies, the “Lovers chord” is full of tension, containing both a prominent major second at the bottom of the stack, and an augmented fifth above the bass. This chord shares pitch and interval class similarities with a number of the other chords. It ties in with the (024) subset shared in the “Nostalgia chord” and “Memory chord”. The prominent interval class 5 is shared with all except the “Lust chord,” but interval class 4 is shared with all except the “Idea chord” and “Wisdom chords.”



Figure 3-15. “Lovers chord,” *Passion*, “Happiness (Part 1),” m. 1.

These chords are striking within their singular, dramatic contexts, but they also share features that unite them across Sondheim’s body of work. The prominent, dissonant second or fourth at the bottom of the stack of all but the “Gun chord” create harmonic instability. This biting sound so close to the bass of the chord is common for Sondheim when creating an important dramatic effect, and yearns for tonal resolution.

Middleground Cohesion

Sondheim does stay in the traditions of the American musical theater in that he identifies himself as a tonal composer:

I haven't studied atonal music. When I studied with Milton Babbitt I asked him if I could study atonality, and he said: 'You haven't exhausted tonal resources for yourself yet, so I'm not going to teach you atonal.' And he was absolutely right; I'm still in tonal.³³

However, he often stretches tonality and uses progressions that are more typical of late Romantic composers. One way in which Sondheim softens the effect of his more adventurous harmonic language is by using a solidly tonal, bass pedal point. This gives him the freedom to push the boundaries of what a musical theater audience would tolerate while still giving them a tonal grounding:

You can get away with a lot of murder when you're over a pedal tone. You can put in a lot of dissonance because the audience's ear—the listener's ear—is firmly anchored in that basic first step of the scale, so they don't feel lost...it makes for tenser music...it may be poverty-stricken to utilize a pedal tone over and over again, but it...helps to make more drama.³⁴

Sondheim admits that this is a “cop out” for him.³⁵ When he feels he is starting to push the limit too much, he will hold together the progression with a pedal bass. The extended employment of pedal leads to Sondheim's use of a slower harmonic rhythm than most Broadway composers.³⁶ The bass harmony remains constant for longer while the color of the chords above changes. He claims “that's fear that it's going to fall apart unless I keep a pedal tone going...I still get the coloristic changes but I don't run the risk of its going

³³ Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 117.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 199.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 198.

off the rails as far as the audience is concerned...an anchor *always* for the listener.”³⁷ The use of pedal as a way to soften dense harmonic constructs is pervasive through Sondheim’s literature, and is evidenced in mm. 59-62 of “The Ballad of Sweeney Todd,” from *Sweeney Todd* and mm. 27-31 of “Happiness,” from *Passion*.

Sondheim’s use of pedal not only softens dense and highly chromatic harmony, it also drives harmonic rhythm and solidifies tonal progressions. He “write[s] a lot of pedal point, but it isn’t just a matter of writing wrong notes in the right hand while you constantly have your ostinato bass...Musical harmony...moves by bass line.”³⁸ However, his pedal is not always used to outline tonic-predominant-dominant-tonic progressions. He sets himself apart:

Most composers of songs and in musical theater tend to use block harmonies. That is to say, everything’s based on the root position...[for example if] for two bars [I wrote] a pedal tone underneath...it’s about time to get off the pot, so to speak. That’s why I try to use inversions.³⁹

His statement about other composers using root position harmonies is a rather unsupported generalization. In his own practice, however, his linear focus on composition allows his lines to move through inversions of harmonies, as is evidenced through the examples to come.

Even with the use of pedal, Sondheim’s harmonic progressions often stretch the limits of tonality. The tonal stretching happens within phrases—as demonstrated by the intricate harmony used over pedal points—in connecting sections, and across entire

³⁷ Ibid., 199.

³⁸ Ibid., 17.

³⁹ Ibid.

pieces. One way in which he stretches tonality is through chromaticism. He uses descending chromatic lines as a compositional glue within and between sections of his songs.⁴⁰

The use of chromaticism is evident in *A Little Night Music*, with a composed-out chromatic melody line that is echoed in the treble accompaniment of mm. 33-40 of “You Must Meet My Wife.” The first and second beats of the bass line also employ this technique, each with the same movement of one descending semitone every two measures.

Sweeney Todd features Sondheim’s most prevalent use of descending chromatic lines, and they occur throughout the musical. The Beggar Woman’s plea for alms—as first witnessed in mm. 27-31 of “No Place Like London”—showcases another composed-out, descending chromatic line. In this case, it happens over an A minor tonic pedal, showing Sondheim’s use of both the pedal and the chromatic line as structural techniques.

Judge Turpin’s “Johanna,” from *Sweeney Todd*, uses the line again in the melody at mm. 76-82, and then continues it in the bass accompaniment (F \sharp mm. 82). This time the bass line volleys tonic and dominant, securing a tonal context.

The beginning of “A Little Priest” moves from the “Idea chord” into this slithering, descending chromatic bass line in mm. 7-16. This time the line begins and ends on C \sharp , composing out an octave. The treble (and tenor) pitches generally support

⁴⁰ The use of a descending bass chromatic line in these dramatic contexts is evocative of a lament. Sondheim may be using the extra-musical association as he does the *Dies Irae* throughout *Sweeney Todd*. See Alex Ross, *Listen to This*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010) for more on extra-musical associations with the lament.

the melody and harmonize it, as the bass moves into and out of consonance with those lines. As this is more of an introduction to the song, the tonality is not as intentional as when the proper song begins.

The final example of descending chromaticism comes from mm. 72-77 of the “Gun Song,” from *Assassins*. This chromatic bass line is used similarly to how it is used in *Sweeney Todd*, except that it employs more functional tonality above it. After reaching the dominant at the end of m. 77, the song comes back to the dominant and resumes the chromatic descent to tonic (C).

Harmonic progressions that are made tonally stable through the use of pedal point and descending chromatic lines hold sections of Sondheim’s songs together on a foreground and middleground level. He also uses progression on background levels to bring entire pieces together musically in ways that reflect dramatic concerns.

Harmonic Progression and Drama

Harmony is used in a number of ways to evoke drama. Treble and bass lines in accompaniment sometimes work against each other to cause harmonic, and thus dramatic tension. Effect chords accentuate a point of dramatic intensity in a song or scene.

Harmonic progression is another way in which Sondheim uses harmony to effect dramatic intensity, by using harmony as the road upon which the dramatic journey takes place.

A number of music theorists have developed tools for understanding the relationship between harmony and drama, and tonality and drama. Some have used the *Tonnetz*—a geometric representation of pitch space—to represent pitch space as either a

just-tuned, infinitely reaching plane (figure 3-16), or a tonally closed torus of twenty-four letter names, representing triads or key areas (figure 3-17). In either representation of the *Tonnetz*, the pitch x-y axes are from two of the following three categories: perfect fifths, major thirds, or minor thirds. The remaining category is used as a diagonal axis.

Daniel Harrison uses a just-tuned *Tonnetz*, and suggests refining the terminology used for discussing dramatically linked harmonic motion. Harrison discusses key relationships in the second movement of Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 2:

To liken the activity to a journey suggests something potentially aimless and wandering. Does one not set out on a journey with the intention of making consistent forward progress towards the destination? Here, paths cross and even regress. Motion resembles less a journey than a military campaign, with advances, retreats and flanking manoeuvres. Read generally, it is movement with opposition, a reach for an objective that can be attained only through struggle and conflict.⁴¹

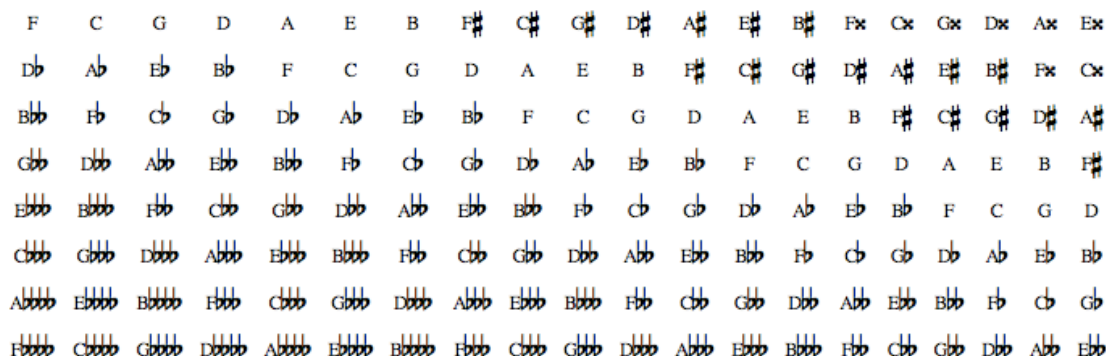


Figure 3-16. A just-tuned *Tonnetz*.

⁴¹ Daniel Harrison, "Nonconformist Notions of Nineteenth-Century Enharmonicism," *Music Analysis* 21, no. 2 (2002): 138.

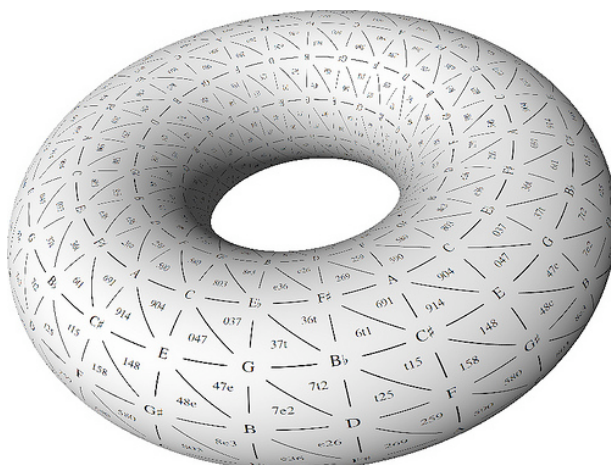
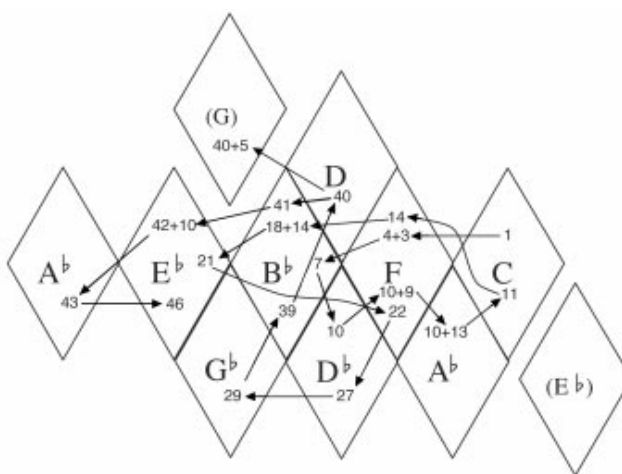


Figure 3-17. An equally-tempered *Tonnetz* on a hypertoroidal shape.⁴²

He maps the tonal motion on the *Tonnetz* showing that to link the narrative plot—which Harrison reads as the resurrection of Jesus Christ—to harmonic motion required the final key to be heard as distant from the starting key.⁴³



**Figure 3-18. Harrison's analysis of tonal paths through
Gustav Mahler's Symphony, No. 2, fifth movement.**

⁴² Endolith, "Tonnetz on a Torus," Yahoo!, Inc., <http://www.flickr.com/photos/omegatron/4648680687/> (accessed July 25, 2011).

⁴³ This is Harrison's figure 5.

Also working with a just-tuned *Tonnetz* and enharmonically distant keys is Berthold Hockener. In his article, "Paths Through *Dichterliebe*," Hockener suggests that dramatic paradoxes can be likened to enharmonic keys that sound the same but are distant from each other on a just-tuned *Tonnetz*.

When the conception of different keys on a tonal map clashes with the perception of their sameness in sound, the composer can convey his poet's paradoxical double experience of wholeness and fragmentation.⁴⁴

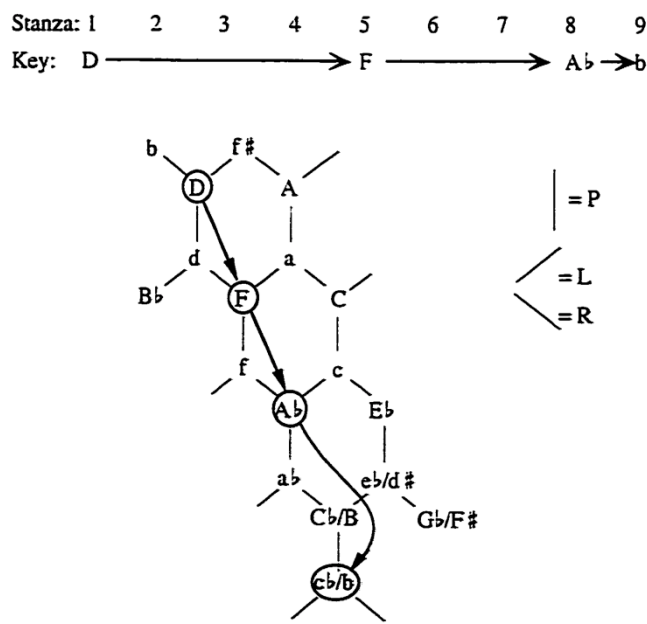
Conversely, Edward Gollin portrays the musicalization of drama as taking place in a finite world. In his dissertation, Gollin offers a reading of Franz Schubert's *Der Pilgrim* in which the apparent move of D major to the distantly related C^b minor is in fact more dramatically relevant when the C^b is considered as an enharmonic B minor. He concludes that

the impossibility of arriving at a true musical Other within the confines of equal temperament is a potent reflection of the pilgrim's inability to find the golden portal. Just as the pilgrim seemingly travels to a distant key, the realm of C-flat-minor, only to find through enharmonic re-spelling that the realm is merely the relative minor of its departure.⁴⁵

Thus, the closed system of twenty-four major and minor keys represents our finite reality.

⁴⁴ Berthold Hockener, "Paths through *Dichterliebe*," *19th-Century Music* 30, no. 1 (2006): 80.

⁴⁵ Edward Gollin, "Representations of Space and Conceptions of Distance in Transformational Music Theories" (Dissertation, Harvard University, 2000), 293. Also Figure 7.5.



**Figure 3-19. Gollin's figure 7.5- an analysis of key progression in
Franz Schubert's *Der Pilgrim*.**

The above theories offer a different perspective on how tonality and drama affect each other, one in a tonally closed universe, one in an infinite tonal universe. In order to understand which is best for approaching Sondheim's music, one should first consider how Sondheim conceives the interaction of harmony, tonality and drama.

Sondheim's perspective on harmony and drama affects his decisions from the foreground to the background. When dealing with foreground events, he

believe[s] absolutely in the coordination between lyric and harmony in that sense: That you change chords, you change texture, you change rhythms when you're changing thoughts. They can be subtle changes, too. And it doesn't have to be big thoughts; it can be little thoughts, little turns of phrase in the lines.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 199.

Acting is all about motive and transitioning between motives. Knowing why a character is doing what they are doing at any given time is essential to an actor. Within a song, if there are different emotional ideas, the actor needs to interpret that motion from one idea to the next. Sondheim is careful to make dramatic and harmonic transitions coincide, “because when you make an emotional transition...it should probably be accompanied...by a harmonic transition of some kind.”⁴⁷

Thus, harmonic choices ultimately serve the greater purpose of advancing the drama in a Sondheim musical. As evidenced in his long line sketches, Sondheim takes great care in planning his harmonic progressions in his background progressions as well as his foreground progressions. When keys change, they are usually treated more as temporary monotonal excursions rather than as true modulations:

I never think in terms of modulation, particularly in this kind of music [*Passion*]. It’s constantly changing—within chord to chord—keys, so to speak. No, I know what the tonality is—I write very tonal music. But to go from chord to chord, where there are changes of the center of tonality? No.⁴⁸

He describes these changes as tonicizations rather than as modulations:

“Milton Babbitt never used the word ‘modulation,’ but ‘temporary tonicization.’ And that’s what they are...That’s a key change, in a way, but it’s really just a passing key change to take you back.”⁴⁹ This way of thinking about tonality reflects both Heinrich Schenker and Arnold Schoenberg, who considered all tonal music to ultimately be monotonal. Schenker was able to relegate every possible scale step—with the exception

⁴⁷ Ibid., 30.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 201.

of the one built on the tritone—and the triads built on those scale steps, to a single major/minor tonal system.⁵⁰

C	D \flat	D	E \flat , E	F	G	A \flat , A	B \flat , B
I	\flat II	\sharp II	III	IV	V	VI	VII

Figure 3-20. Heinrich Schenker's Monotonal *Stufen*.⁵¹

Schenker's system, as well as his methods for analytical reduction, make sense for Sondheim's music in that they relegate everything to a central tonality. The songs are not modulating, rather they are taking excursions within the boundaries of a centralized, governing tonic.

Similarly, Schoenberg's "Chart of Regions" offers a perspective that shows every major and minor triad's relationship to a central tonic. The advantage of Schoenberg's chart over Schenker's is that certain chords are perceived as much farther from the tonic than others. The perception of distance is important in Sondheim's musico-dramatic progressions.

⁵⁰ For more on why the tritone would not be part of the tonal system, see Matthew Brown, Douglas Dempster, and Dave Headlam, "The \sharp IV(\flat V) Hypothesis: Testing the Limits of Schenker's Theory of Tonality," *Music Theory Spectrum* 19, no. 2 (Autumn, 1997). Tonally speaking, a chord built on the tritone is functioning as a dominant of the dominant.

⁵¹ Heinrich Schenker, *Harmony*, ed. Oswald Jonas, trans. Elisabeth Mann Borgese (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 298. This edition corrects a misprint in Schenker's original, where he leaves out the \sharp II *Stufen*.

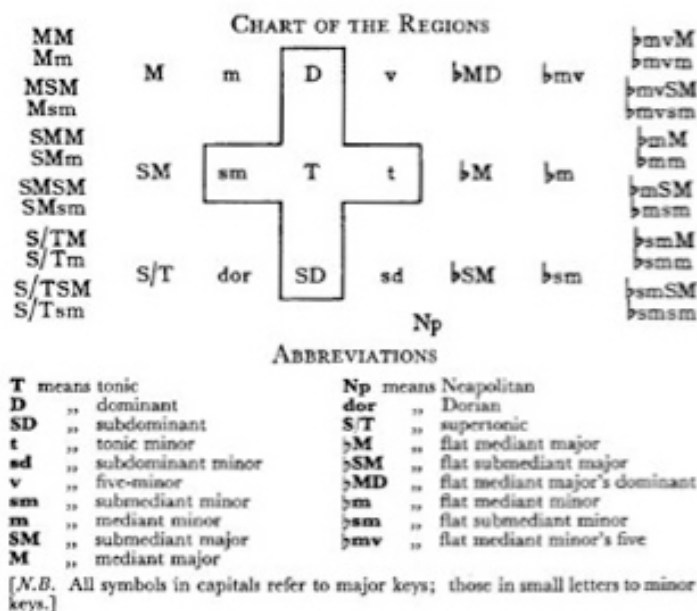


Figure 3-21. Schoenberg's Chart of the Regions.⁵²

An argument against Sondheim's views on monotonicity is that in practice, there are times where his songs begin in one key and end on another. However, if he is considering them to be monotonic, perhaps his use of key changes implies off-tonic beginnings to some of his pieces. "Being Alive" is a likely candidate for this method. The change of key that occurs is at a significant point of emotional transition. The move from C major to D \flat major is no arbitrary, pop music "pump-up modulation."⁵³ Rather, it occurs when Robert changes from discussing marital sacrifices as impersonal to personal.

⁵² Arnold Schoenberg, *Structural Functions of Harmony* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975), 20-21.

⁵³ See Adam Ricci, "'A Hard Habit to Break': The Integration of Harmonic Cycles and Voice-Leading Structure in Two Songs by Chicago," *Indiana Theory Review* 21 (2000): 130-32, and Jocelyn R. Neal, "Narrative Paradigms, Musical Signifiers, and Form as Function in Country Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2007). Neal defines such a modulation as "an ascending, direct modulation, either by half- or whole-

Formally, this song is AAAA||AABA. The initial four A phrases are the impersonal, mostly incomplete statements that are part of the musical scene. The final A phrase is the only complete one, which moves directly into the change from C major to D \flat major. The four statements of A in C major may be an off-tonic opening, acting as a Smith dominant that prepares the “actual” beginning of the song.⁵⁴ Once the song begins in D \flat , it becomes a standard thirty-two bar, AABA song. The drama is heightened by the change of key, which reflects the change from impersonal to personal, allowing Robert to work out his feelings and understand the sacrifices required in a committed relationship.

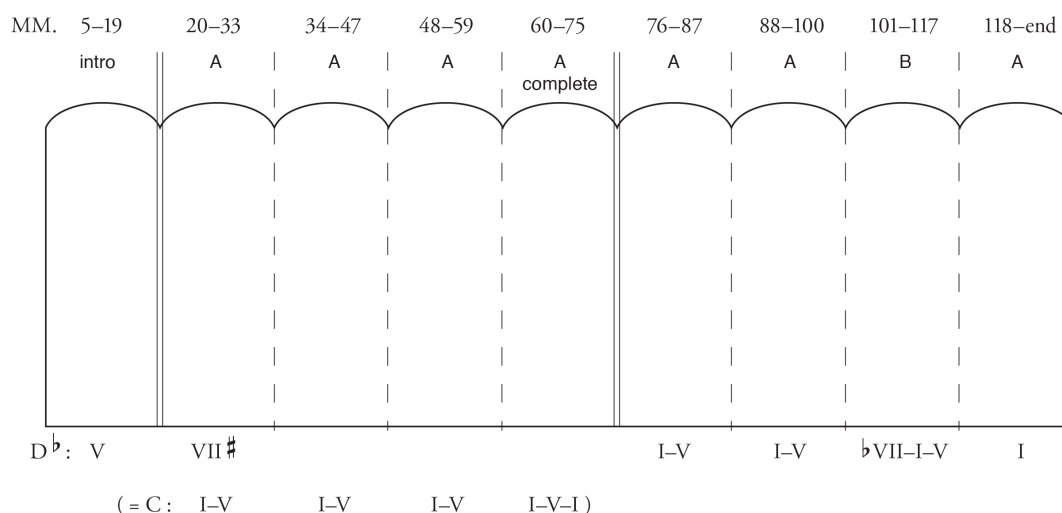


Figure 3-22. Form of *Company*, “Being Alive.”

step, prior to the final unit of the song. These modulations are generally considered surface-level embellishments, although they occasionally relate in significant ways to the text of the song.” (Neal 2007, 48).

⁵⁴ See Charles Smith, “The Functional Extravagance of Chromatic Chords,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 8 (1986). A Smith dominant is any chord that contains the leading-tone or subtonic, thus assuming dominant function.

m. 5 20 34 48 60 73 74 76 99 102 118 131 132

(=V VII#) I V V I V I

Figure 3-23. Monotonal reduction of *Company*, “Being Alive.”

Monotonal Excursions

Monotonicity dominates Sondheim’s compositions, but one of the ways in which he makes his compositional voice clear is how he stretches the monotonicity of the progressions to such an extent that the ultimate return to tonic is affected. These monotonal excursions are ultimately tied to the drama.

Sondheim also conveys drama through harmonic progression. The climax of *Sunday in the Park with George* encompasses the musico-dramatic events of mm. 100-131 in “Move On.” With Dot’s help, young George learns to connect to both his artistic and family heritage. As George makes the connection, the harmonic progression moves with the lyric. The harmonic reduction in figure 3-24 shows the chord progression.

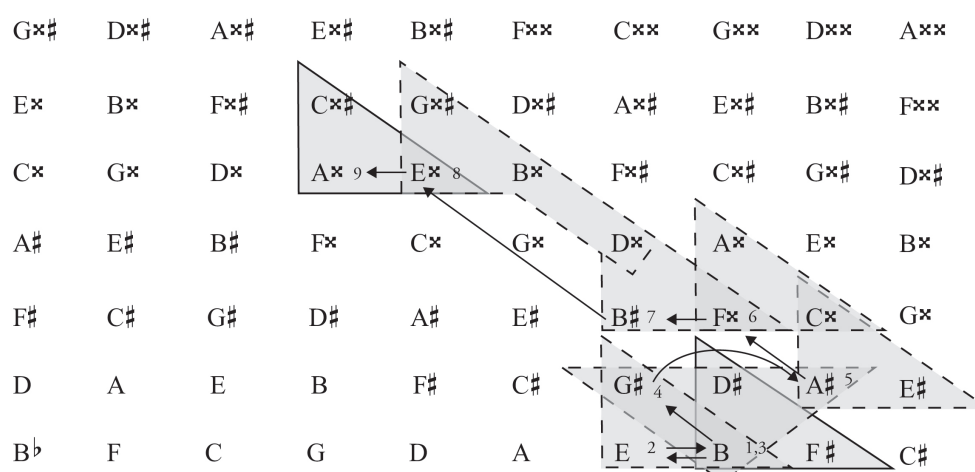
mt. 102 104 108 111 119 122 123 126 127 130 131

(on) light looked now color care And the feel-ing And the life Mov-ing on

I IV⁷ I⁹ vi⁹ VII[#] bVI bII V¹¹ I

**Figure 3-24. Reduction of *Sunday in the Park with George*,
“Move On,” mm. 100-131.**

Using the *Tonnetz* to map the progression shows just how far George has journeyed to make these important connections. A typical I–IV–II–V–I progression travels slightly Northwest on the *Tonnetz*.



**Figure 3-25. Traversing the *Tonnetz* in *Sunday in the Park with George*,
“Move On,” mm. 100-130.**

The “Move On” progression begins with a typical progression I–IV–(I)–VI. At m. 119, the move from G \sharp minor to B \flat major triads has no common tones. The melody A \sharp (as the ninth of G \sharp minor) helps connect these chords. The new progression from B \flat major to G major to C major takes place directly north of the B major to E major to B major to G \sharp minor progression. C major typically has no common tones with the F \sharp in m. 30. However, that C is reinterpreted as the Neapolitan in the key of B, which spatially is a modified ii $^\circ$ chord (essentially a modified dominant of the dominant). This moves to F \sharp , where the dominant seventh’s most well formed configuration on the *Tonnetz* is a triangle with a panhandle (chord eight in figure 3-25), where the seventh (E) is a common tone with the third of the Neapolitan. The F \sharp dominant is also given an added eleventh (B) which help connect the F \sharp chord to the previous two harmonies. A typical I–vi–(IV)–ii–V–I progression travels one unit north and four units west. “Move On” travels four units west, but four units north as well.

The overall harmonic progression travels far from tonic, which sets up the expectation of a modulation as the chords progress. However, the progression turns around, treating the final three chords as a \flat II–V–I progression in B major. Without seeing the score, most would likely assume that it does indeed modulate. The return of the tonic, although a “different” tonic, also serves a dramatic purpose. George is not changing who he is so much as he is seeing things from a new perspective. The circular progression takes George on a journey as he develops his thoughts, but the journey takes him to a better understanding of who he is.

Another example of monotonal excursions reflecting dramatic design is in the middle section of “I Know Things Now,” from *Into the Woods*. Little Red’s most important point of emotional change is during the B section of the song, when she is describing her descent into the Wolf’s stomach and then ultimately being freed.

The overarching tonality of this number is C major, but the B section takes excursions through a four-sharp key signature and a four-flat key signature before returning to C major for the final A section. Trying to identify the four-sharp key signature is highly problematic. The lead-in at the end of A (mm. 20-26) keeps C as tonic, with the occasional G to help solidify the bass as a tonic-dominant alteration. Accidentals B \flat , E \flat , and A \flat are gradually added to create a parallel minor shift. Once the B section enters at m. 27 this bass alteration continues, but above this bass is a clear move to an A \flat major tonality, creating ambiguity between treble and bass.

The written key changes to four sharps at m. 31, but the C \sharp remains in the bass. The melody by itself stays diatonic to a four-sharp system, but all of the other lines employ accidentals in a gradual, ascending slither through m. 34. The slither leads to a four-measure dominant pedal in the key of A \flat , the new written key in mm. 35-38.

This dominant never resolves as expected. At the end of the section in m. 38, Little Red talks about being “back at the start,” where the A section returns, and so does the original tonality, re-transitioning the emotion and the harmony back to where it started. The melody G4 ($\hat{7}$) on the word “start” is reinterpreted as $\hat{5}$ in the key of C, as the melody from the A section returns and the tonality moves directly back into C major.

m. 20 24 27 30 31 34 35 37 38 39

said teeth know Granny dark light start know

I I bVI bVI? Ab: V bIII bIII bIII I

Figure 3-26. Monotonal reduction of *Into the Woods*.

“I Know Things Now,” mm. 20-39.

C# G# D# A# E#

A E B F# C#

F C_{1,2,5} G D A

Db Ab₃ Eb₄ Bb F

Bbb Fb Cb Gb Db

Figure 3-27. Coming “back to the start” on the *Tonnetz* in *Into the Woods*, “I Know Things Now,” mm. 20-39.

A more elaborate use of key to affect dramatic change occurs in “Not While I’m Around,” from *Sweeney Todd*. The song begins in A \flat , with a tonic prolongation through m. 10. There is a quicker harmonic rhythm from mm. 11-20, as the song approaches a weak cadential feeling, and a repeat of A at m. 21.

The repeated A section ends solidly on tonic after an authentic cadence. After some underscored dialogue over the tonic pedal, the key abruptly moves up a half step to A major in m. 43. The intensity increases significantly, with Tobias's melody in a higher register. The song does not stay in A major for very long (about ten measures), so it is not any kind of typical pump-up modulation, and is not much like "Being Alive." Instead, it is more of a long-range progression through the B section. The $A\flat$ at the end of the first section can be reinterpreted as an enharmonically spelled $G\sharp$, and thus acts as a Smith dominant ($VII\sharp$) that resolves the leading tone to A major.

A major moves to $C\sharp$ major with a chromatic third relation. This becomes a dominant to $F\sharp$, which then becomes the dominant of B major. The B section theme is heard again in B major, reflecting Tobias's child-like anxiety and lack of attention span. The B tonic remains as a pedal until m. 62. The melody moves up to $D\sharp$, and becomes a common tone with $E\flat$. The common tone modulation moves B major back to the original key of $A\flat$ major. This move from $B\flat$ to $A\flat$ also reflects back to the initial, weak cadence in the A section, where the last strong bass harmony was $B\flat$ minor, which eventually gave way back to $A\flat$. After Tobias's discovery of Pirelli's purse, the mode becomes ambiguous in mm. 67-74, where Sondheim uses both $C\flat$ and $C\sharp$.

The $C\flat$ wins the battle and becomes the new tonic, in another abrupt modulation to C major, where Mrs. Lovett picks up the melody in the wrong key. Tobias takes over and forces the key back to $A\flat$, which is the lowered submediant of C major. The difficulty is finding the link between the chords in m. 88 and m. 89. The chord in m. 88 could be interpreted as some type of augmented sixth chord—likely the Fr^{+6}/IV —that

would resolve to $D\flat$ in m. 89. Measure 89 leads back into the A section, much like the end of the original A section, and the harmony progresses tonally to the ending $A\flat$.

m. 1 43 53 54 55 63 75 83 85 86 88 89 93

I b II b III I III Fr/IV IV I

=A: I III

=B: II V I

=C: I IV iii VI ii

Figure 3-28. Monotonal reduction of *Sweeney Todd*,

“Not While I’m Around,” mm. 81-89.

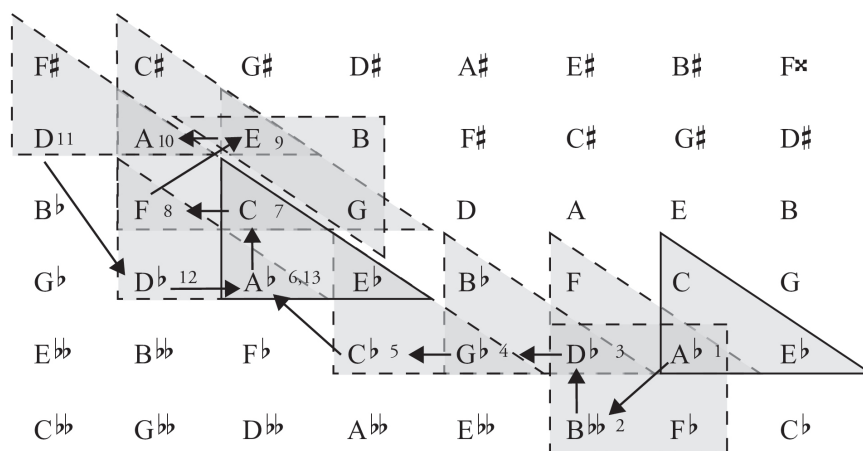


Figure 3-29. Dramatic monotonicity through the *Tonnetz* in

***Sweeney Todd*, “Not While I’m Around,” mm. 81-89.**

Conclusion on Harmony

Although the exact chord structures that Sondheim uses throughout his musicals are not particular only to him, the ways in which he uses harmony are a considerable factor in assessing his musical style. The use of dissonant, juxtaposed, contrapuntal lines in his accompaniments is particularly rare in musical theater songwriting. Also, he sets himself apart by his use of effect harmonies that correlate with important dramatic events. Finally, his use of harmonic progression and tonality further solidify his voice, especially in the ways he sends characters on a dramatic journey through an expanded use of monotonicity. Ultimately, then, Sondheim's music combines aspects of a number of musical theories in the ways he approaches harmony, tonality and drama. Although he considers his music to be monotonic, the narratives progress in such a way as to bring about lasting change on the characters within. A song may start off-tonic and eventually find its way to the home key. Otherwise, it may start and end in the same written key, but go through tonal transformations that ultimately place it in a distant place on a tonal map. This reflects the idea that characters undergo some kind of personal change throughout any piece of drama, linking his use of harmony to his attention to dramatic concerns.

Chapter 4. Melody

More often I will get a melodic shape in my mind from what I'm writing lyrically, and that will often be the first musical notes on that piece. It will often not end up to be the actual tune that I use, but it has a set of stresses and inflections which echo or support what I'm trying to do. I am very helped if I can find a harmonic accompaniment or a rhythmic accompaniment that will evoke what I'm trying to say.

—Stephen Sondheim¹

When considering melodic writing for the musical theater, there are two notions that require distinction. The first is whether a composer writes a melody first and then harmonizes it, or writes the harmony first and then the melody. These options will be respectively called the melody-first approach and the harmony-first approach. The second is whether a composer writes a melodic tune first and then fits lyrics to it, or initially takes the lyrics and then fits a melody to them.² These options will be respectively called the music-first approach and the lyrics-first approach. Sondheim's previous claims show that he is a harmony-first and lyrics-first composer. These statements are useful in guiding an analysis of Sondheim's melodic structure. By first focusing on how the melodic construction might be affected through the harmony-first approach, and then analyzing how the lyrics and drama shape the melody, one can begin to unpack the melodic aspect of his musical language.

Melodic Properties in Sondheim's Music

The harmony-first versus melody-first approach to melodic writing may affect the properties of melodic lines. There are not many accounts of songwriters in the musical

¹ Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 37.

² It is also plausible for a composer/lyricist to work out both music and lyrics almost simultaneously.

theater writing harmonic progressions before they compose the melody. More likely, the rhythm of the text is decided upon and set to pitches, or the lyrics are set to an already composed melodic line—which may or may not also have a harmonic foundation laid out. As discussed in the third chapter, Irving Berlin, who could not read or write music, sang his melodies to his music secretary, who then helped him find appropriate harmonies. Songwriter Bob Merrill is famous for writing his melodies on a toy xylophone.³

Sondheim, however, claims that the harmony typically comes before the melody in his music. Performers of his musicals have differing opinions on whether his approach to melodic writing makes his music more difficult to sing: “Some singers say: I don’t know why people say your stuff is so hard...it’s very logical....others say the opposite—particularly when melodic lines skip, particularly when they go down a seventh.”⁴

Because Sondheim uses such extended harmonies, it is difficult to tell how the harmony implies the melody, and whether this process actually creates a distinctly different melodic style for Sondheim. In order to ascertain whether Sondheim’s melodic style is any different than what is normal for Western classical music or popular songs, his melodies need to be compared to statistical data gathered for such music. David Huron offers five statistical properties of melody in his book *Sweet Anticipation: Music*

³ "Bob Merrill Bibliography," Sylar Media, www.thebobmerrill.com (accessed July 31, 2011).

⁴ Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 120.

and the Psychology of Expectation: pitch proximity, step declination, step inertia, melodic regression and melodic arch, which will be explained below.⁵

Huron's work summarizes, adapts, but also criticizes many existing theories of melodic motion and expectation offered by music theorists like Leonard B. Meyer and Eugene Narmour, along with work by cognitive psychologists. By utilizing the tools and data offered by Huron, Sondheim's melodies can be compared to those of other classical and popular song composers, which will help to quantify any differences between his melodies and those of other styles.⁶

In order to make these statistical claims about Sondheim's music, three melodic phrases from each of his musicals have been chosen as a representative sample of his style.⁷ The phrases utilize each of Huron's five statistical properties to show how Sondheim compares to other composers of Western classical and popular music.⁸

Pitch proximity deals with the observed generalization that melodies "typically employ sequences of tones that are close to one another in pitch."⁹ Huron offers a graph

⁵ David Huron, *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2006), 73-89.

⁶ What Huron labels as "folk" songs will here be labeled "popular" songs.

⁷ A detailed list of the sampled melodies is located in appendix B. Because of the lack of access to any printed score for *Road Show*, melodies from this musical were not included. There are pitch inconsistencies in the recording that make it difficult to tell the difference between a missed note by the performers and a chromatic variant written by Sondheim.

⁸ Phrase beginnings and endings are not accounted for in the data, so one may argue that some of the data is skewed, such as those involving intervals from the end of one phrase to the beginning of another. However, the numbers of these occurrences are insignificant because of the sheer number of notes sampled.

⁹ Huron, *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation*, 74.

that shows how often particular intervals happen in melodies from different cultures around the world.

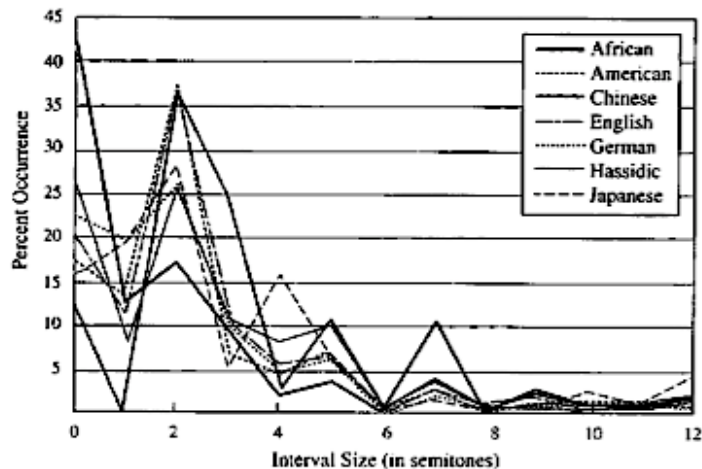


Figure 5.1
Frequency of occurrence of melodic intervals in notated sources for folk and popular melodies from ten cultures. African sample includes Pondo, Venda, Xhosa, and Zulu works. Note that interval sizes only roughly correspond to equally tempered semitones.

Figure 4-1. Pitch Proximity, Huron's figure 5.1.

When considering Sondheim's musicals, the most important data comes from American, English and German melodies, since those are the traditions that most notably influence Sondheim's writing. However, the graph shows that the general shape of all of the cultures sampled is similar. The graph in figure 4-2 shows that the frequency of which Sondheim uses particular intervals is extremely similar to those sampled by Huron. This is important, in that it shows that his harmony-first approach to composition does not affect the propensity to choose smaller intervals over larger ones. It also suggests that, if pitch proximity is the sole determinant of what makes a melody singable or memorable, then Sondheim's melodies are no less singable or memorable than many other melodies.

If indeed Sondheim's melodies are more challenging, then other factors besides pitch proximity play a role in this.

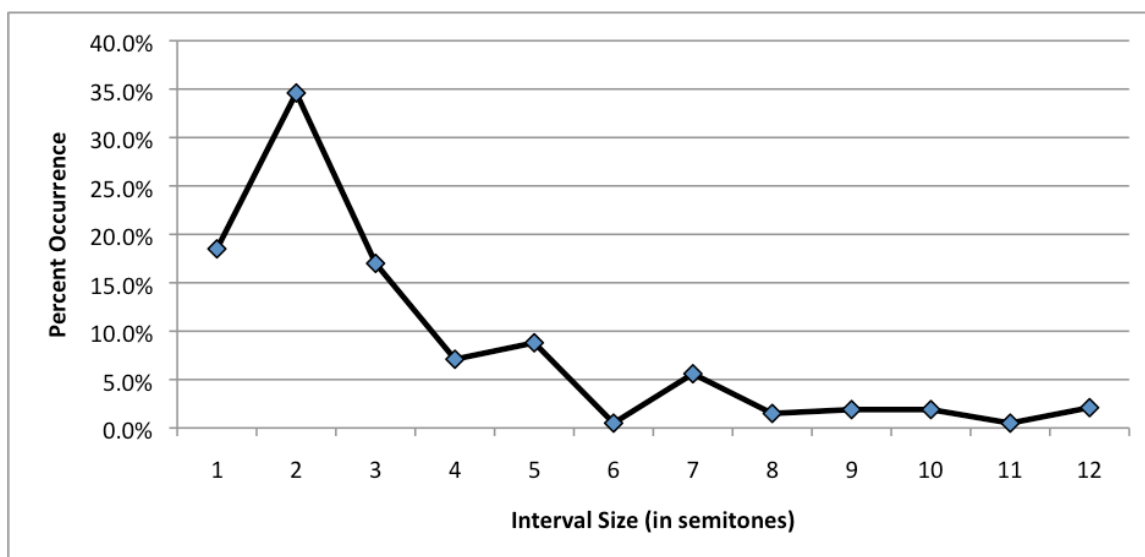


Figure 4-2. Pitch Proximity in Sondheim's Melodies.

Step declination deals with the theory that “large melodic intervals are more likely to ascend and that small melodic intervals are more likely to descend.”¹⁰ Huron replicates data from Piet Vos and Jim Troost at the University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands, who found this theory to hold true.

¹⁰ Ibid., 75.

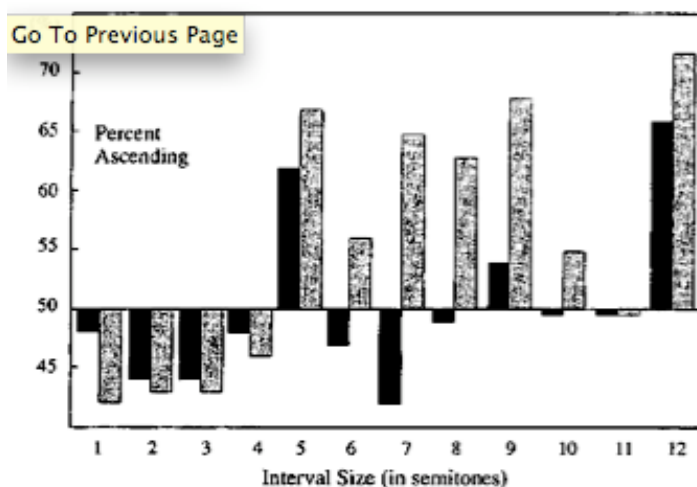


Figure 5.2

Proportion of non-unison melodic intervals that ascend in pitch. Dark bars: sample of thirteen Western composers. Light bars: sample of Albanian, Bulgarian, Iberian, Irish, Macedonian, Norwegian, and African-American folk songs. From Vos and Troost 1989.

Figure 4-3. Step Declination, Huron's figure 5.2.

There are significant differences between Huron's 5.2 and the Sondheim samples shown in figure 4-4. The whole and half steps of Sondheim's music statistically tend to ascend, rather than descend. Also of note are the differences between his use of perfect fifths, minor sixths, major sevenths, and octaves. For Sondheim, perfect fifths have a slightly greater tendency to ascend (53%), where in Huron's sample of Western composers they have a strong propensity to descend (around 60%). Minor sixths are more commonly found ascending (67%) in the Sondheim samples, whereas Huron's samples are about 55% more likely to descend. Major sevenths are 71% ascending in Sondheim as opposed to over 50% descending in Huron's sample. The octave in Sondheim's samples descends 72% of the time, whereas in Huron's sample they ascend around 65% of the time.

Most important is that the data shows that, when it comes to properties of step-declination, Sondheim's melodies differ significantly from other Western melodic styles, in that his melodies that move by step generally tend to ascend rather than descend. These differences in directional change for so many of Sondheim's intervals may be one factor in what makes Sondheim's music more challenging to perform and for audiences to grasp, in that they are different than what many performers and listeners expect.

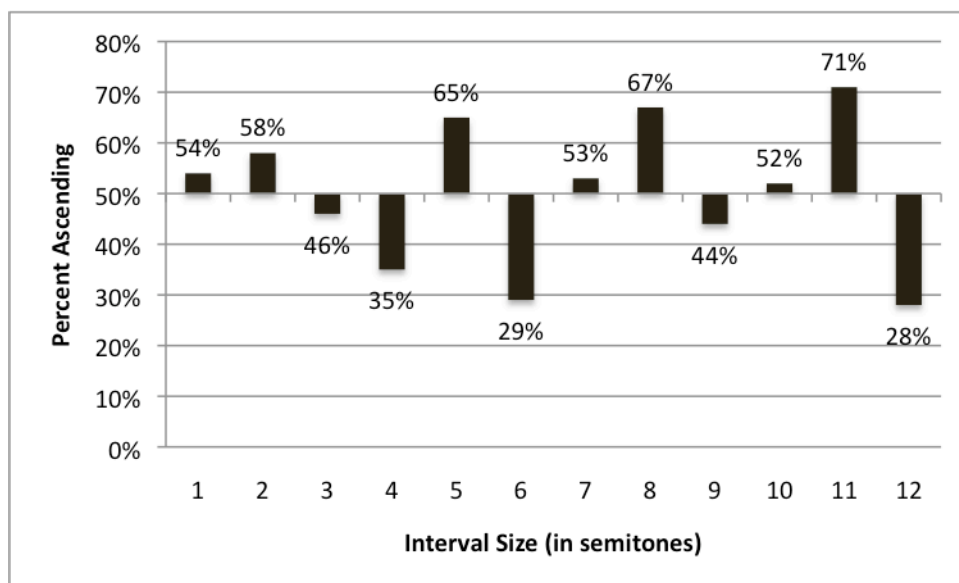


Figure 4-4. Step Declination in Sondheim's Melodies.

The next property that Huron considers is step inertia. This property states that “most small pitch intervals tend to be followed by pitch contours that continue in the same direction.”¹¹ Huron's data shows that an ascending step is almost as likely to be followed by a step in either direction, whereas a descending step is far more likely to be followed by another descending step.

¹¹ Ibid., 77.

Table 5.1

Probabilities for step-step movements in a large sample of Western and non-Western musics.

	Followed by ascending step	Followed by descending step
Initial descending step	30%	70%
Initial ascending step	51%	49%

Figure 4-5. Step Inertia, Huron's table 5.1.

The data for the Sondheim samples shows a significant difference in this category. Sondheim melodies will almost just as likely switch direction as they will continue in the same direction, no matter if they are ascending or descending. Most significant is that Sondheim's melodies do not follow the theory of descending step inertia, and in fact, his descending step followed by descending step probability is smaller than all other stepwise motions. This radical difference in melodic propensity from Huron's sample may be one factor in what makes Sondheim's melodies more difficult, because the musical defies performers's and audiences's expectations of Western, tonal melodies.

Probabilities for step-step movements in a sample of thirty-nine Sondheim melodies

	Followed by ascending step	Followed by descending step
Initial descending step	55%	45%
Initial ascending step	54%	46%

Table 4-1. Step Inertia in Sondheim.

Melodic regression analysis constitutes the fourth of Huron's five properties. He discusses the regularly assumed melodic tendency of *post-skip reversal* (after Paul von

Hippel), where a melody changes direction after a large melodic leap.¹² Huron finds that a truer claim is that leaps often take the singer either high or low in their tessitura. After such a leap, a melody will regress in the direction of the middle pitch of the tessitura, what Huron calls the melodic mean. Melodies tend to move towards the mean pitch after a leap.¹³

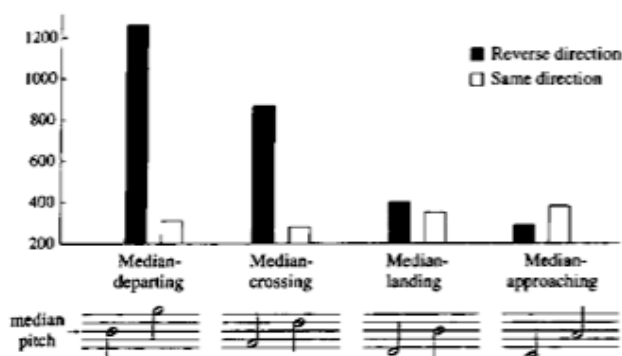


Figure 5.5

Number of instances of various melodic leaps found in a cross-cultural sample of melodies. Most large intervals that approach the median pitch continue in the same melodic direction. Large intervals that land on the median pitch are as likely to continue in the same direction as to reverse direction. Results support the phenomenon of melodic regression and fail to support post-leap reversal. From von Hippel and Huron 2000.

Figure 4-6. Melodic Regression, Huron's figure 5.5.

In the Sondheim samples, much of the data follows the same trend as the Huron samples. The only significant difference is that there are far more median-approaching intervals relative to the overall numbers. This category outweighs the median-landing category, and the same direction median-approaching leaps are just as frequent as the reverse direction median-crossing leaps. Like Huron's sample, Sondheim's melodies do

¹² See Paul von Hippel, "Post-Skip Reversals Reconsidered: Melodic Practice and Melodic Psychology" (dissertation, Stanford University, 1998).

¹³ Huron, *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation*, 80-85.

not support the post-leap reversal theory. This data shows that Sondheim is not much different in terms of how he leaves large leaps than many other Western composers. Therefore this is not a supportable argument for what makes Sondheim's melodies difficult to perform or grasp from a listening perspective.

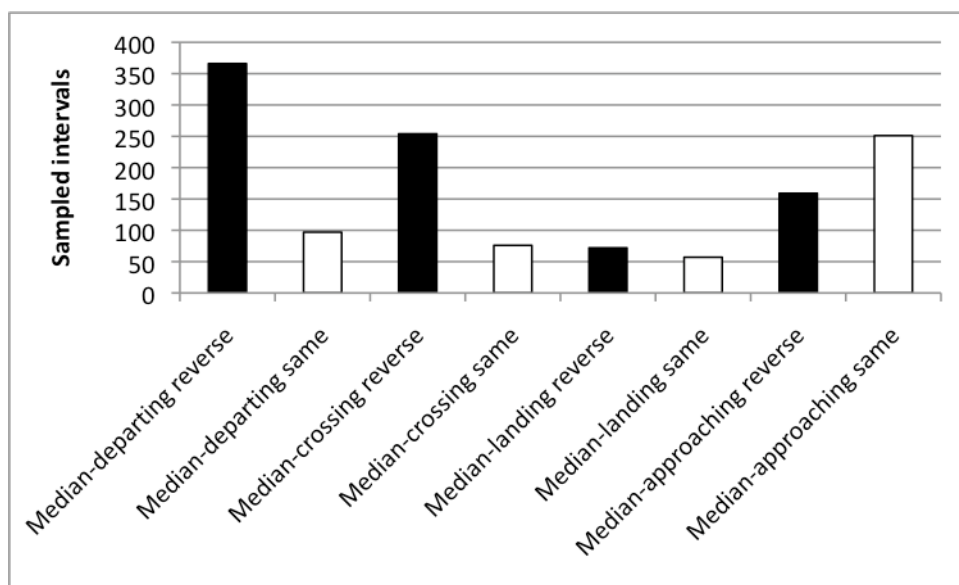


Figure 4-7. Melodic Regression in Sondheim.

The last property Huron discusses is that of melodic arch. This theory states that most Western melodies have an arch shape, where a single phrase tends to rise and fall.¹⁴ Huron sampled over six thousand song phrases to collect his data, allowing for trends in melodic arches to become more prevalent due to the sheer number of samples. The Sondheim data contains only thirty-nine songs of various phrase lengths, which results in a scatter plot due to insufficient data for this particular melodic property. Constructing a shape based on a regression line from this limited data is fruitless. Besides this, the shape

¹⁴ Ibid., 85-88.

of Sondheim's melodies does not tell us much about their content or their difficulty in terms of performance and perception.

A comparison of Sondheim's use of melody to Huron's findings shows that although Sondheim generally uses the same types of intervals in his melodic writing as other composers of Western music, the directional properties are significantly different. This could be caused by a number of different factors, including his composing of harmony first or his attention to musical prosody. It is difficult to say what exactly led to Sondheim making these choices in his composition, but it does help to identify what sets his melodic style apart from others.

The most significant differences derive from the step declination and step inertia properties. These are likely to be prominent aspects of what makes Sondheim's music difficult for many performers and listeners. Performers and listeners have a certain set of expectations for how melodies ought to behave. If a majority of the melodies they are used to singing and listening to generally tend to follow the property of step declination—where small intervals generally descend and large intervals generally ascend—then when they come across a Sondheim piece that generally tends to do the opposite, the music goes against expectations. This makes it more challenging to guess what ought to come next in the melody. Likewise, one expects a melody to follow the property of step inertia, so that descending stepwise motion tends to continue in the same direction. When instead one encounters a Sondheim melody in which steps are just as likely to change direction as they are to continue, it again confuses expectations, making it more difficult to predict where the melody ought to go. This makes it more challenging to perform and to grasp aurally.

Melodic Devices Common in One or More Shows

Other factors of melodic composition show how Sondheim's melodic voice is distinct, particularly in the idiom of American musical theater. The primary musical focus of most Sondheim scholars, including Stephen Banfield and Steve Swayne, is more of a modernist approach in the realm of melodic motive. They discuss how Sondheim's motives develop and expand throughout a song or even an entire show. Swayne quotes Sondheim: "all of [Kern's] best songs have that economy indigenous to the best art: the maximum development of the minimum material."¹⁵ Sondheim claims that he tries to do a lot with a little, a skill he learned from his compositional study with Milton Babbitt. In Swayne's words, "the marvel of Sondheim's melodies is their close motivic unfolding rather than their expansive tunefulness."¹⁶ Swayne brings up the idea again and again of Sondheim being an "economical" composer, which he takes from Sondheim himself, who talks about his own "insistence on economy."¹⁷

Swayne shows how Sondheim does a lot with a little in the song "What Can You Lose?" from the movie *Dick Tracy*. He also describes some motivic usage in the rest of Sondheim's shows. Banfield provides greater depth in tracing the use of melodic motive throughout many of Sondheim's musicals. Sondheim revealed in an earlier quotation that the score for *Anyone Can Whistle* might have been built from the opening motive in the overture. In general, many scholars show how motives motivate much of Sondheim's melodic language within particular shows. Sondheim's use of motivic coherence

¹⁵ Swayne, *How Sondheim Found His Sound*, 53.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁷ Zadan, *Sondheim & Co*, 41.

becomes a more stylistically distinctive use of developing motivic themes in shows written after *Pacific Overtures*. In particular, *Sweeney Todd*, *Merrily We Roll Along*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Into the Woods* and *Passion* feature an abundant use of developing themes. Although the use of thematic development is a compositional process that brings unity to style, the stylistic voice is more strongly identified if there are also similarities between shows and not just within them.

Motivic Stops and Melodic Cadences

While listening to Sondheim's complete body of work, certain melodic devices stand out that are shared between shows. As with dramatic concerns, accompaniment and harmony, after any composer finds their melodic voice they are likely to repeat musical approaches from work to work. In particular for Sondheim's melodies is his approach to melodic cadences.

Traditions of melodic writing through counterpoint texts avoid allowing the writing of diatonic and chromatic intervals at the sixth or seventh because they are difficult to sing.¹⁸ Sevenths are especially difficult for the ear to grasp, and require a nimbleness of range and an accurate ear since they are dissonant intervals that span almost an entire octave. In general, one would expect a composer who takes such care in writing melody that reflects patterns of speech to use mostly small intervals. Good rules for melodic writing in tonal music have generally been agreed upon through a history of

¹⁸ Robert Gauldin, *A Practical Guide to Sixteenth-Century Counterpoint* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1995), 17.

counterpoint texts: mostly stepwise, conjunct motion as well as a few leaps. Leaps typically outline a triad, or follow Huron's theory of melodic regression.¹⁹

Figures 4-1 through 4-7 show that Sondheim mostly follows these traditional guidelines, yet the ways in which he does stretch them help to define his melodic voice. Although the survey of his melodies shows that he writes relatively few direct sixths (3.4%), sevenths (2.4%) and octaves (2.1%), Sondheim writes a significant number of leaps larger than a fifth at the end of a motive or phrase.²⁰ These leaps are occasionally direct intervals, but often they are outlines of these larger intervals composed of two smaller intervals. Outlining triads is not typical of Sondheim. Instead, Sondheim gravitates toward writing outlined sevenths, sometimes as combinations of three thirds, but more often as a combination of a third and fifth or two fourths.

It is not so much the frequency of these motivic stops or cadences that make them so distinct a part of Sondheim's style, although they do happen often enough through his scores to be considered a salient part of his overall style. Instead, it is the regularity in how he approaches them that makes them stand out. They are typically approached by neighbor motion and then left by a descending leap. They also contain metric regularities, in that they occur at the end of the measure, with the lowest boundary pitch occurring on the last beat, or last part of the beat.

There are a few places throughout his scores where this is especially distinct as a direct interval. The distinction comes in its use at the end of a motive or phrase. Many of

¹⁹ Ibid., 17-18.

²⁰ Seventeen of the thirty-nine melodies sampled contain a large interval at a motive or sub-phrase stop or cadence. The data from these may be a little skewed, because the samples are small and mostly taken from the first full phrase of the song or section, potentially eliminating melodically salient formal endings.

fourths. This makes it easier for the singer to execute, and also makes the lines less disjunct and more melodic. Although the foreground intervals are the small ones, the overall shape of the line allows the listener to hear the larger interval as a background unit. It is especially common for him to write these skips at the ends of melodic phrases, where they are either the end of a distinct motive or a cadence point. The seventh is quite distinct, and is usually descending, even when outlined with small intervals. In mm. 8-10 of “That Frank,” from *Merrily We Roll Along*, the seventh leap is broken into a third followed by a fifth. An extended motive precedes this, containing a neighbor motion in m. 9 that leaps up a sixth before the seventh occurs, drawing even more attention to this series of descending leaps that follows an ascending leap.

In *Into the Woods*, this idea becomes a theme that Sondheim uses throughout the show, with its first iteration in “Act One Opening (Part 1),” m. 12. The motive begins with a neighbor motion, leaps to the upper boundary pitch, and then descends a third then a fifth, ending on the fourth beat of the measure.

The seventh is the most distinct because of its melodic dissonance, but other intervals larger than a fifth share a similar distinction in the amount of pitch space they traverse, and Sondheim uses them in ways that are enough like his use of the seventh to constitute hearing them as the same kind of melodic cadence.

The *Into the Woods* example is very similar to m. 21 of “Happiness,” from *Passion*, and m. 7 of “It’s Hot Up Here,” from *Sunday in the Park with George*, except that the final interval of the latter two examples outlines an octave instead of a seventh. Both contain a neighbor motion that leads to a broken octave leap. The “Happiness”

motive ends on beat four, where “It’s Hot Up Here” has the same rhythm in diminution, ending on the second half of beat four.

“Another National Anthem,” from *Assassins*, uses a stepwise, neighbor figure in mm. 157-159 that is followed by a leap up to the boundary interval and then leaps downward. This time, however, the downward leaps are thirds, and so the larger interval is a fifth. Even though the boundary interval is smaller, the approach taken to get to this melodic cadence is similar to the ones above, reflecting a stylistic consistency.

On occasion, Sondheim will reverse the process, and end a motive or phrase with an ascending leap. Most spoken sentences end with a downward inflection of speech, which is likely why Sondheim would choose for the melodic cadences to typically descend.²¹

At the end of “Agony,” from *Into the Woods* (mm. 69-70), the ascending seventh is the final interval of the song, an uncommon move even for Sondheim. Like many of the examples above, this seventh is also preceded by a stepwise motive. What sets this apart is the negating of the traditionally expected downward resolution of $\hat{2} - \hat{1}$. Rather, $\hat{2}$ instead leaps up a seventh to $\hat{1}$, as an inverted second, merging traditional tonal expectations with his idiosyncratic style.

There are a few cases in which Sondheim combines both direct leaps and broken larger intervals. One instance occurs in mm. 172-173 of “Opening,” from *Assassins*, where the direct descending seventh is followed by an ascending, broken octave.

²¹ Huron, *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation*, 77.

Another example of this is in mm. 20-21 of “It Takes Two,” from *Into the Woods*, where the Baker leaps up a seventh then breaks the octave, this time through three leaps instead of two. The relatively high number of instances of this type of cadence in Sondheim’s work assists in bringing these shows together under the umbrella of his melodic voice.

Lyrics-First: How Prosody Affects Melody

Virgil Thomson elaborates on the long-standing distinction between lyrics-first and music-first approaches to melodic writing:

Some composers first look toward finding the words a suitable rhythm. This approach to melody is, I think, largely American...Many [other] composers find a harmony first, then let the melody cover its constituent tones. This is an ancient practice...²²

The “American,” lyrics-first approach described by Thomson is one that has been used by a number of famous musical theater composers, but mostly after Rodgers and Hammerstein. Musical theater writers of the 1920s and 1930s were primarily music-first composers. However, plenty of famous American songwriters also have taken the music-first approach. Richard Rodgers is a famous case of one who switched camps. When working with Lorenz Hart, Hart would usually write the lyrics based on Rodgers music. When this partnership ended, and he began to work with Oscar Hammerstein II, the opposite happened, and Rodgers would typically write the music to Hammerstein’s lyrics.²³

²² Virgil Thomson, *Music with Words: A Composer's View* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 44.

²³ William G. Hyland, *Richard Rodgers*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 138.

In most of these cases, on both sides, the composer is separate from the lyricist, providing a separation of duties. Although there was typically a lot of collaboration during the songwriting process, with revisions and give and take from both the composer and lyricist, they each had their own jobs. Separating the duties becomes more difficult when dealing with composer/lyricists who write both the music and the lyrics. Famous composer/ lyricists before Sondheim include Cole Porter and Irving Berlin. Geoffrey Block points out that both men described their working process as usually beginning with a title or particular lyric phrase and then working out a melody that incorporated the phrase.²⁴

Stephen Sondheim suggests that he tackles melody in a slightly different way. He elaborates on how he works out prosody and melody:

I handle the lyric first...it's important that I get as much of the lyric done as possible right away, because once the music is done, that's it for me. I'm trapped in that form.²⁵ ...If you write 'Just One of Those Things,' the way Cole Porter did, he wrote it without the melodic values, he wrote 'It— was—just—one—of—those...'—he wrote that rhythmically on the paper, and then he filled in the notes. So I will do that quite often. If I think of a line that I want—either an opening line or a refrain line—that will often suggest a melodic idea, particularly if you take the inflection of the way it's spoken; because I write often for inflection of sentences that will suggest by inflection what you want sung.²⁶

From this statement, it seems clear that Sondheim supports a lyrics-first approach, where he likens his writing process to that of Cole Porter. He elaborates on Block's

²⁴ Geoffrey Block, "The Melody (and the Words) Linger On: American Musical Comedies of the 1920s and 1930s," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, 2nd Edition, ed. William Everett and Paul Laird (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 114-15.

²⁵ Stephen Citron, *The Musical: From the Inside Out*. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd., 1991), 58.

²⁶ Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 204.

analysis, saying that Porter would “fill in the notes” after he figured out the text-based rhythmic idea. Sondheim suggests that his melodic line also comes about in the same way, but from earlier sources and chapters, it has been shown that before writing a complete melody, he will work out a dramatic context that is colored by accompaniment and harmony. From this harmonic underpinning, the complete melody line comes forth, which places Sondheim more effectively in Thomson’s music-first camp, where the harmony comes before the melodic line.²⁷ From this one may conclude that he begins more with the dramatic idea rather than the actual lyrics to be used. He would then be a music-first composer with the music based in the dramatic concerns, which might come from some lyrical ideas.

Whereas previous Broadway composers work with melody as either a first stage—music-first—or second stage—lyrics-first—element, Sondheim leaves the complete realization of a melodic line until the end of the compositional process.²⁸ A more thorough examination of his understanding of his compositional process shows that the lyric first informs a basic melodic shape, giving way a little to the lyrics-first approach:

I will get a melodic shape in my mind from what I’m writing lyrically, and that will often be the first musical notes of the piece. It will often not end up to be the actual tune that I use, but it has a set of stresses and inflections which echo or support what I’m trying to do.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid., 10.

²⁸ The above quotation from Sondheim does suggest that the lyrics might give him melodic ideas earlier in the process, showing yet again that a complete separation of these musical elements is an impossible task.

²⁹ Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 37.

He also states that the final melody comes from the lyric, and that the musicality of the language suggests both a melodic outline and a rhythm.³⁰

This process then leads to a different style of melodic writing from most musical theater composers; one that is often quite disjunct—especially at cadences—and where the phrases are shorter and less legato, because it is so focused on mimicking patterns of speech within the contextual musical framework already laid out.³¹ Besides the lyrics, the dramatic concerns continue to reign supreme, and also affect the melodic construction in his songs.

Conversational Melody

Sondheim will often shorten or distort melodic motives and phrases if they are dictated by the dramatic concerns. Sondheim makes these irregularities particular to his style, showcasing them in instances of action songs, repeated motives, phrase stretching, scored dialogue and when dealing with non-singing actors. One must often take into account the musical prosody—the relationship between the prosody of the lyrics with their musical setting—to account for melodic style.

One definition of musical prosody is “the correct marriage of words and music.”³² Sondheim composes his music and lyrics in the way in which he feels they are most conversation-like. He states that he is

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ The notable influence of Bernstein, who also wrote many disjunct vocal lines, may be present here as well.

³² Kasha and Hirschhorn, *If They Ask You, You Can Write a Song*, 97.

very concerned, always, with writing conversational songs. And conversation tends not to be as square as two, three, and four. Conversation tends to divide itself up into units of two and three and four and five and six and seven.³³

He is specifically speaking in regards to his use of $\frac{5}{8}$ meter in “Ladies in Their Sensitivities” from *Sweeney Todd*, but this process of writing conversational song affects the choices he makes that lead to distinctive stylistic features of his melodies.

Action Songs

There are songs where the actual action of what the character is doing shape the musical phrases, which will be called “action songs.” These songs often feature a distortion in the flow of a musical phrase, because what the character is doing is being acted out in time with the music. This often interrupts the singer’s melodic phrasing.

Although this is rare in musical theater before Sondheim, it is not without precedent, particularly in opera. A famous example is the opening to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s *Le Nozze di Figaro*, “*Cinque, dieci, venti, trenta*” (“Five, ten, twenty, thirty”), where Figaro is measuring a room. Another is Jacques Offenbach’s “*Les oiseaux dans la charmille*” (known as “The Doll Song”) from *Les contes d’Hoffman*, where the singer, playing a mechanical doll, must be cranked to restart after winding down several times during the aria.

Sondheim uses action songs as part of his style. They fit well with his attention to drama, in that they do not stop dramatic action. One example of an action song in Sondheim is mm. 7-10 of “The Worst Pies in London,” from *Sweeney Todd*. In this number, Mrs. Lovett is introduced to the audience as she is coercing Sweeney Todd into trying one of her awful meat pies. She sings the song as she is working on making the

³³ Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 141.

pies. Among her actions are sticking a knife into a counter, wiping her hands, pushing Todd, and so on.

Another example of an action song is mm. 102-114 of “The Gun Song,” from *Assassins*. One section of this song features Moore as she tries to tell the audience about the gun she bought. She searches through her purse for the gun, unable to find it for a while. Her melody is interrupted by her frustration with not being able to find it and the tangent of finding her shoe instead. The interruptions and tangents are conveyed through both the pitch and rhythm of the melody, which ultimately make the musical phrases irregular. As mentioned in the second chapter, the use of irregular meter in “Worst Pies in London” may reflect the dubious psychological state of Mrs. Lovett, which also may be true of Moore in “The Gun Song.”

“Franklin Shepherd Inc.,” from *Merrily We Roll Along*, also features a number of actions, which are either vocalized by Charlie or played in the orchestra. Charley is on a talk show, sarcastically describing his working relationship with Frank—or lack thereof, due to all the interruptions in mm. 8-11. The sextuplets in the accompaniment are diegetic sound effects produced by the orchestra to evoke first Frank playing piano (m. 8), then Charley typing (m. 9) and finally the phone ringing (m. 10). The melody is describing the action played, and after these actions, the next part of the song is spoken in rhythm rather than sung, further blurring the line between monologue and song.

Motivic Saturation

Another common melodic device for Sondheim is the use of continuously repeated motives within a single musical phrase. This is distinctly different from the use of melodic reprises, repeated thematic material, or even repeated motives within or

between songs. These immediate repetitions disallow any kind of musico-formal progress, since the melodic material remains static, although there can be dramatic progress through the lyrics. The phrases become a proverbial broken record, where the same motive is repeated again and again, usually for at least the length of an entire four-measure phrase. In some cases the pitch material does not change, where in most cases it is sequenced to at least add some pitch variety.

In his book, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, Leonard B. Meyer suggests that our normal expectation is of progressive change and growth. A figure [i.e. motive] that is repeated over and over again arouses a strong expectation of change both because continuation is inhibited and because the figure is not allowed to reach completion.³⁴

Meyer finds that “saturation” through repeated motives causes tension, in that expectations of the music to continue on to something new are not being fulfilled. He states that saturation is context dependent; it is more acceptable at the end of a piece, because at the end it establishes a desirable lack of continuation, being the close of the piece. One expects tension and release of that tension at the end.³⁵

Sondheim uses saturation to stretch and extend musical phrases, proving his insistence on economy. This technique, and the tension it creates, also lends itself well to dramatic song writing, in that his use of motivic saturation often occurs at the climax of the song. In these cases, the characters are usually trying to work out a thought in which an idea is rehashed and developed.

³⁴ Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 135.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

“Could I Leave You?” from *Follies* is one of Phyllis’s features, in which she sarcastically lists to her husband Ben all the reasons why it would not be hard for her to leave him. She comes to a point in mm. 146-158 where the list spirals almost out of her control at the end. The motive repeats exact pitch content five times before a modified sequence repeats the motivic idea six more times.

The triplet motive of “Not a Day Goes By,” from *Merrily We Roll Along*, is heard eight times in succession, with a change in pitch half way through. The repetition of the motive makes the melody more dramatic by drawing greater attention to the character’s feelings. The first time it is heard, in mm. 15-21, it is not at the end of the song. Any sense of expecting the end of the piece is unrealized, as the repeated phrase elides directly into a new phrase. Later in the song this material is repeated again, but on the repeating lyrical phrase “day after day,” bringing both motivic and lyrical repetition, a heightened sense of tension, and finally the end of the piece.

The Baker’s Wife relays her thoughts to the audience in mm. 85-89 of “Moments in the Woods,” from *Into the Woods*. She is working out what her “moment” with the Prince meant, and what is truly important in her life. In this case, there is no written *rubato*, but Sondheim provides a caesura at the end of each double repetition of the motive for the actress to take a dramatic pause. The pitches never change in this case, but the caesurae allow a break in the meter, giving at least a rhythmic respite, and allowing the character to formulate her thoughts.

Hypermetric and Rhythmic Phrase Alteration

In the previous cases, the repetitions may stagnate the sense of musical progression, but they do not interfere with the meter or hypermeter. Sometimes there is even a written *rubato* or break to give the performer more time to dramatically develop the thought, as in the caesura marks in “Moments in the Woods.” Another use of repeated motive in Sondheim interrupts hypermetric regularity: the motives enter on different beats, there are more or less rests in between repetitions, or longer notes of the motive are made shorter or shorter notes are made longer.

In mm. 93-105 of “On the Steps of the Palace,” from *Into the Woods*, Cinderella is relaying how she figured out her idea to leave her slipper behind for the Prince to find. Her line not only repeats the three-note motive over and over, it also rhymes, and the character sings this knowingly to the audience. The repeated motive is fragmented beginning at m. 100, and leads to a meter change from $\frac{6}{8}$ to $\frac{9}{8}$. The final note of the motive is shortened from two beats to one, and an extra rest is added in m. 103.

A recomposition of this melody shows what it might be like if the repeated motives were placed in regular metric and hypermetric positions. The motives remain constant in terms of rhythm and there is no meter change, allowing for two, eight-measure phrases. The recomposition sterilizes Sondheim’s ingenuity, and takes away from the dramatic writing of the song. However, it allows one to see that it is through Sondheim’s inventive use of rhythm and meter that a potentially sterile melodic/rhythmic phrase group can be transformed into a charming melody. Cinderella is working out each

of these motivic fragments as fragmented thoughts, and Sondheim's irregularity makes it more acceptable as something someone would actually do.

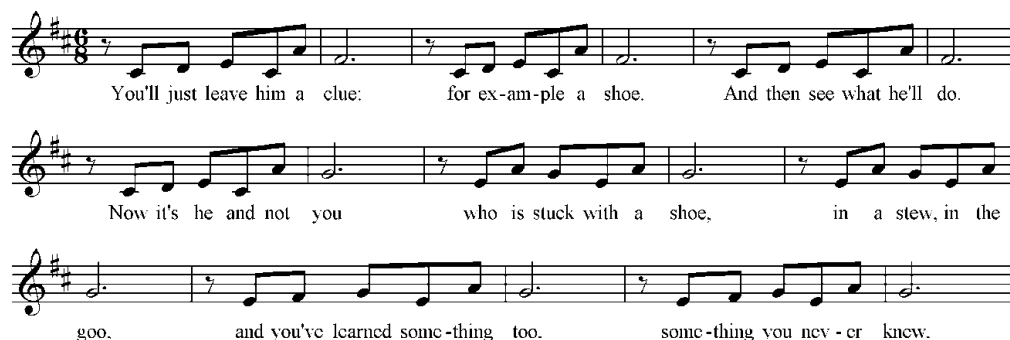


Figure 4-8. Recompositon of “On the Steps of the Palace.”

Dot admonishes modern George in mm. 155-160 of “Move On,” from *Sunday in the Park with George*, saying “Anything you do, let it come from you, then it will be new.” As with both Cinderella and the Baker’s Wife, Dot’s phrase cycles through lyrically rhyming motives. In this case it is to sum up what she is saying to him, to impart words of wisdom for a struggling artist. The motivic idea of four eighth notes followed by a longer note recurs throughout the entire song, usually with the eighth notes on beats three and four and the longer note falling on beat one. In this case, there is irregularity, as the quadruple meter is disturbed by the repetition of pitch and rhythmic pattern on beat four of m. 155. Hypermetrically, it feels more like it is in triple meter at this point. This corrects itself at m. 157.

Recomposition 4-9a normalizes the melody so that the first eighth note of the series begins on beat one, matching the way the song ends, and creating a four bar phrase. 4-9b instead takes into account the earlier occurrences of having the long note enter on beat one. In either case, the melody becomes bland, as the same motive is repeated three

times in a row without any change in pitch or rhythm. Sondheim again was able to make a potentially boring phrase interesting through the disruption of the hypermeter, showing that he is attentive to his insistence on economy—making a lot out of a little.

a. Retention of beat one beginning.



b. Change to anacrusis beginning.



Figure 4-9. Recompositions of “Move On.”

“God that’s Good,” from *Sweeney Todd*, features a combination of repeated motive and action song. The liquidation of the motive in mm. 225-226 (“I’ll pound three times”) into an isolated descending fourth causes a hypermetric dissonance, where the meter is not rewritten, but becomes difficult to find. The motive is expanded to three notes in m. 232, allowing the end of the section to happen on the final beat of the measure. Before this, however, the meter could be conceived as either a stretched $\frac{12}{8}$ or stretched $\frac{15}{8}$. Figure 4-10 shows the two possible interpretations of the meter in this section.

MRS. LOVETT

12 : 8 wait-ing be-low for the whis-tle to blow...

15 : 8 1 2 3 4 5

TODD

12 : 8 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

mf

When I'm cer-tain that you're in place, I'll pound three times. (Pounds)

1 2 3 4 5 6? 1? 2 3 4 5 1

(Knocks the air)

5? 1? 2 3 4 5? 1? 2 3 4 5? 6?

Three times. (Pounds) And then you Three

(Pounds) (Pounds)

2 3 4 5 1 2 3 4 5 6? 1 2

1 2 3 4 5? 1 2 3 4 5? 6? 1

times... If you Ex - act - ly...

Figure 4-10. *Sweeney Todd*, “God that’s Good,” mm. 224-232.

There are other times in which the rhythm in a regular musical phrase without repeated motive is simply stretched or constricted because of characterization. An example is found in mm. 11-18 of “Johanna” from *Sweeney Todd*. As mentioned in the second chapter, this song begins with a sense of waltz in four, where beat three seems to be stretched and becomes stuck in limbo. Sondheim reflects these accompaniment choices in his melodic writing as well.

The song’s B section causes the listener a bit of metrical duress, due to the stretching of the melodic phrase. The sense of waltz in four is forgone in the first

measure. The bass plays low, open fifths on beat one of every measure as the treble harmonizes the melodic line, accompanying the pop-influenced syncopations. There is an oscillation in the treble at m. 11, with a strong emphasis on beat three and a clear beat four, disintegrating the sense of waltz. In m. 12, the bass features a version of the A section's bass line—a waltz in four—although here it is in diminution.

Although syncopated, the first line, “I was half convinced I’d waken,” is in a regular sense of metric, melodic time. The second syllable of “waken” occurs on beat three, as the word is stretched over an entire measure as one stretches when they wake from sleep. The lyrics of the next line, “satisfied enough to dream you,” are where the melodic rhythm is stretched. The pitch pattern is broken on the word “dream” as the F is replaced by the G^b “blue note,” and the rhythm of the phrase holds on just a little too long for comfort. The resolution to the word “you” is short and abrupt, so that when the next line enters in time there is not the expected space between the lines. The lyric is “happily I was mistaken;” dramatically, the mistake was thinking she was a dream, and the pitch and rhythm of the phrase are the “mistake” in the music. Anthony, as a singer and character, must abruptly come back to reality to continue the phrase to the cadence.

Scored Dialogue

Traditionally, musical theater duets are typically written where the characters trade off complete musical phrases. When they sing together it is in direct harmony, or maybe they sing their individual phrases in counterpoint with each other. As seen in the previous chapter, Sondheim will use these types of textures in his harmony, but for him dramatic concerns come first. Because of this, he will often write songs for multiple

characters as though they were scenes of dialogue set to music, as opposed to a duet, trio, and so forth. Commonly found in operatic writing, this is rare for musical theater composers before Sondheim, although it is found on occasion, such as in Leonard Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti*.³⁶

Scored dialogue is set apart from duet writing in that the singers do not perform complete musical phrases. Instead, basic ideas or motivic fragments are executed in succession, where the sum of the fragments leads to complete musical phrases. A traditional duet might also deal with more abstract subject matter, where the line between singing to the audience and conversing with the other character is blurred. With Sondheim's scored dialogue, the characters are definitely conversing with each other.

In many of his shows, and in musicals before Sondheim, dialogue occurs within musical numbers in rhythmic time, as can be seen in mm. 136-137 of "Waiting for the Girls Upstairs," from *Follies*. Sondheim takes this one step further by creating melodic lines out of the dialogue. An early example can be found in "Poor Baby," from *Company*. The wives are expressing to their husbands their desire for Robert to have a woman. As shown in mm. 20-27, the overall melodic line takes a back seat to the short melodic motives that provide the back-and-forth between the spouses, providing a commentary on stereotypical wife and husband relationships.

"Barcelona," from *Company*, features a more complete long-range melodic line, with the characters trading melody every measure from mm. 5-8. Also, "Waiting for the Girls Upstairs," from *Follies*, begins with dialogue in rhythm at m. 136, but introduces scored dialogue in mm. 138-146.

³⁶ Because of their collaboration on *West Side Story*, it would only make sense that Leonard Bernstein influenced Sondheim's musico-dramatic voice.

Sondheim perpetuates the technique in mm. 154-161 of “Someone in a Tree,” from *Pacific Overtures*. The fast-paced trading of lines becomes overlapped, as the characters sing what are likely parenthetical asides underneath each other’s motives. The Warrior’s “Or very near” and the Reciter’s “So I notice” asides provide a bit of comedy to the situation.

Sondheim employs regular, eight-measure musical phrases in mm. 50-57 of “A Weekend in the Country,” from *A Little Night Music*. The characters trade lines of dialogue through a straightforward melodic phrase.

Anthony relays to Johanna his plan to escape the Judge and elope in “Kiss Me,” from *Sweeney Todd*. During much of the song, Johanna is anxious and not listening to anything Anthony says, and the musical lines overlap. When it finally occurs to her what he is proposing, she calms down and they sing to each other in succession in mm. 18-21.

“Opening Doors” from *Merrily We Roll Along* becomes more complex, in that there are more than two characters involved in the dialogue, and that these events are not actually happening in real time. This song begins with the artists struggling to find success, and in the end of the number they get their first break. There is an undetermined amount of time between each statement, but it is treated as though they are dialoguing with each other in rapid succession, as demonstrated in mm. 32-34.

The condescending dialogue between Greenberg and Redmond as they criticize George’s art in mm. 2-10 of “Putting it Together (Part 3),” from *Sunday in the Park with George*, features one character whose musical and conversational line dominates the other. It seems that Redmond is working hard to insert himself into Greenberg’s rant. He

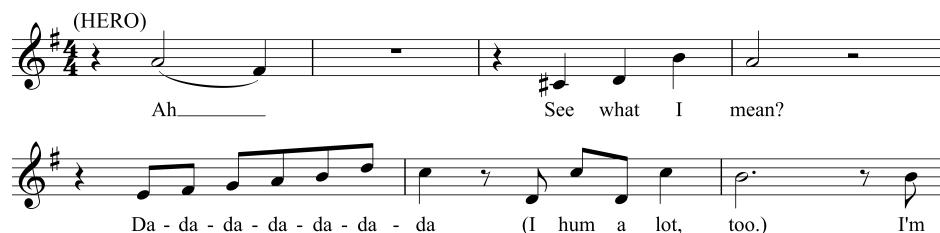
finally gets the chance in the concluding motive at m. 9, where their roles, and their melodic lines, reverse.

The complexity of scored dialogue is heightened even more than “Opening Doors” in mm. 34-38 of “Your Fault,” from *Into the Woods*. Jack, the Witch, the Baker, Little Red, and Cinderella are all blaming each other in regards to whose fault it is that the Giant has destroyed half their kingdom. The angst is musicalized in rapid succession from one character to the next, with many short motives that take place during a longer melodic line.

A similarly intense moment of thick texture created by multiple voices sharing scored dialogue occurs in mm. 54-60 of “Another National Anthem,” from *Assassins*. The intensity is heightened through the use of increasingly shorter note values and shorter melodic segments. The assassins are increasing in collective anger towards the futility of their actions, which they thought would be world-changing.

“Scene 8,” from *Passion*, encompasses multiple actors and the use of scored dialogue and rhythmic speech. The soldiers are gossiping about Giorgio and Fosca, and also playing a game of pool. Measures 5-14 feature a combination of scored dialogue and an action song. It is appropriately titled as a scene, in that it is truly a scene of dialogue set to music.

In some cases Sondheim uses a similar technique, but with the actor conversing directly with the audience, as though the audience is a character in the show, and the “fourth wall”—a phrase used in theater to describe the imaginary wall between the actors and audience—is broken. Sondheim uses this in mm. 65-72 of “Love, I Hear,” from *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*.



**Example 4-3. *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*,
“Love, I Hear,” mm. 65-72.**

One of the reasons actors like to sing Sondheim’s music is that he writes beautiful tunes for people who are not primarily singers. Trained singers are used to sustaining longer melodic phrases without the need to breathe within the musical phrase, whereas actor-singers may not have the diaphragmatic control to handle that kind of sustained singing. Sondheim takes this into consideration by writing in rests, or he may end a motive that lasts one or two measure with a long note—which is often shortened in performance—so the actor can take a breath. This affects the melodic lines, in that they are less legato, and contain more rests than a typical tune.

In some cases, the leads of original cast Sondheim shows that were chosen were not classically trained singers. Because of this the melodic range is quite limited and the time between rests is expanded in some of Sondheim’s most beloved songs.³⁷ “Send in the Clowns,” from *A Little Night Music* was written after Glynis Johns was cast in the role.³⁸ Sondheim was aware that she could not handle long, vocal phrasing, and so wrote short motives with ample rest time between each, as evidenced in mm. 2-7.

³⁷ At the same time, some of Sondheim’s roles are very demanding vocally and require highly trained singers. A few examples are Pirelli, the Beadle and Johanna from *Sweeney Todd*.

Recognizing Sondheim's Melodies and Concluding Remarks

Many critics have accused Sondheim of not writing tuneful, or “hummable” melodies. Sondheim defends himself by saying “critics and audiences have said...my scores [are not hummable], when in point of fact, *anything is hummable*. Hummable really means familiar.”³⁹ Sondheim may be over-generalizing here. There are many melodies that are difficult to remember even after multiple hearings, and some that are easy to remember after hearing them once. More likely, some melodies are simply more difficult than others, and many of Sondheim's fall on the more difficult side of the spectrum. Joanne Gordon states, “If audiences do not hum after a Sondheim musical, it is both because they have not been exposed to the melodies as often and because Sondheim's music is not simple.”⁴⁰ Gordon offers two excellent points: first, that Sondheim's melodies are not familiar because of lack of repetition throughout many of his musicals; second that they are not simple, likely because they have properties that are just different enough from typical Western music melodies that make them difficult for audiences to initially grasp.

As for familiarity through exposure, it comes with hearing the tunes again and again. Traditionally, musicals had overtures to give the audience access to the tunes before the show started. After the major tunes were heard, they were often reprised—with or without the same lyrics—and were sometimes included with the entr'acte, if there was

³⁸ Zadan, *Sondheim & Co*, 185. Also see Mark Eden Horowitz, "Biography of a Song: "Send in the Clowns"," *The Sondheim Review*, Winter 2005.

³⁹ Zadan, *Sondheim & Co*, 27.

⁴⁰ Gordon, *Art Isn't Easy: The Achievement of Stephen Sondheim*, 7.

one. For Sondheim, whose form is dictated by the dramatic content, traditional overtures are few, and so are reprises. The only Sondheim shows that include a traditional overture are *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, *Follies*, and *Merrily We Roll Along*. All three of these shows were written specifically to evoke an older form of musical comedy, and so the inclusion of an overture was appropriate. Besides these—and some other non-traditional overtures—Sondheim’s musicals do not give the audience the added advantage of hearing the tunes before they come into the context of the show.

Reprises are another way that composers make their tunes more familiar to audiences. Many musicals have relatively few new musical numbers in the second act, and instead reprise important numbers from the first act.⁴¹ Sometimes there are new lyrics, but most often music and lyrics are repeated. An example of this is “Some Enchanted Evening” from Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *South Pacific*. In the beginning of the first act, Emile sings this number to woo his love, Nellie. At the end of the act, Nellie decides she cannot be with Emile because of her prejudice. Rather than letting her go, he resolves to go after her, making the repeated line—“then fly to her side, and make her your own”—even more poignant dramatically. Sondheim only includes reprises when he feels there is a dramatic reason for doing so, and yet there are reprises of musical material, especially in the form of recurring motives and themes in musicals after and including *Sweeney Todd*. These themes often grow and develop, making it difficult to remember a single iteration of a theme. Because of factors like this, despite the use of

⁴¹ One major reason for this was to sell sheet music of what was initially perceived to be the best numbers of the shows.

some reprises and thematic repetition, the listener cannot rely on these devices to become familiar with Sondheim's difficult melodies.⁴² Admittedly, Sondheim has not generated many "hit" songs despite his relative successes in the theater.

Many of Sondheim's melodies are not easily memorable because they are difficult, both in terms of performance and perception. The sample of songs chosen to represent Sondheim from each of his musicals show that although he keeps certain properties of melodic writing in line with Western traditions, the ones he does not keep set him apart. In particular are the properties of step declination and step inertia, where Sondheim's melodies do not follow the performance or listening expectations established by Western classical and popular songwriting.

Despite the difficulty of Sondheim's melodies, there are a number of ways in which his melodic voice is easily identifiable from musical to musical. Scholars like Swayne and Banfield have previously shown his adeptness at developing motives within particular shows, but Sondheim also uses similar motivic devices from show to show, especially melodic stops and cadences. In addition to this, his careful use of prosody informs the ways in which he crafts melody. His attention to conversational songwriting affects the construction of his songs on the level of motive and phrase, ultimately shaping the rhythm and pitch choices as well. The extended use of repeated motives are employed primarily for characters that are working out an important thought, and occur often in his works. Scored dialogue allows dramatic action to continue as a scene progresses musically between multiple actors. Because the drama reigns supreme, actors love to sing

⁴² With available recordings or upon multiple viewings of a stage version, these melodies can easily become more familiar.

his music, and he has even written a number of roles to allow for untrained singers to perform beautiful songs that were crafted specifically to evoke the drama and work within their skills as singers. All of these factors contribute to his melodic voice as one of the main factors in understanding his compositional voice.

Conclusion: A Theory of Stephen Sondheim's Style

I have offered a theory of style by surveying the musicals of Stephen Sondheim, using the topics of dramatic concerns, accompaniment, harmony, and melody for detailed analysis of his music. The analysis has shown that Sondheim is deeply rooted in the traditions of the American musical theater, although some scholars have likened his work to opera, operetta, or even music drama. His musical theater training came from one of the great creators of the musical theater, Oscar Hammerstein II, whose direct influence is apparent in Sondheim's attention to dramatic concerns. Musically, although he studied with the often atonal, serial composer Milton Babbitt, their study was focused on the intricacies of tonal music. Sondheim uses the basic forms and tonal musical language of American musical theater composers as a framework on which he has built new constructs.

Along with being rooted in the tradition, Sondheim has had a significant impact in changing the American musical theater. He stretches the forms and musical vocabulary to reflect dramatic situations as no composer/lyricist has done before him. He is able to reflect drama and character on the musical level of phrase, song, musical scene, act and show that create hierarchical levels of musico-dramatic action. The extended musical scene combines multiple proper songs and underscore with dialogue to create larger musico-dramatic entities. These develop the music and plot simultaneously.

Sondheim's self-stated compositional process typically begins with accompaniment patterns. He uses many traditional Broadway accompaniment patterns in his work, but it is the ways in which he stretches these schemata that set him apart. He

uses devices such as developing accompaniment, emerging meter, and the waltz in four to exercise his accompanimental voice.

Although he is primarily a tonal composer, Sondheim's harmonic language often stretches the limits of tonality. His harmonic voice is affected by underlying counterpoint and the accompaniment textures he chooses. He often uses techniques where the treble and bass include material that does not seem to fit together. When he uses dissonance between the staves, it is often used diagonally instead of vertically to lessen the dissonant effect. His use of effect harmony follows in the tradition of the dramatic works of Igor Stravinsky, where particular chords are used to signify important dramatic events. Sondheim uses chromaticism and pedal points to lessen the shock of adventurous harmony and also as a middleground harmonic glue. He conceives of the background of his songs as being in one key, but pushes the limits of the tonality through the use of monotonal excursions. This use of harmony sets him apart from his predecessors and contemporaries in the musical theater.

Melody in Sondheim flows from the prosody. Because of this, Sondheim has melodic phrases that are often irregular, shortened, and follow natural rhythms of speech in ways that affect the motives and phrases of his music. The data compiled from thirty-nine Sondheim songs shows that although he follows a number of norms in Western-based melodic writing, there are a few properties of his melodic style that set him apart. Especially pertinent are the differences in step inertia and step declination properties of his writing, which go against the expectations established by the composers sampled by David Huron. His use of large leaps at motivic stops and melodic cadences, extended

repeated motives, and scored dialogue bring together music and drama in an identifiable melodic style.

Sondheim believes that he found his own voice in his second Broadway-produced musical, *Anyone Can Whistle*.¹ That voice was then confirmed in *Company* and matured throughout the rest of his musicals. In general, Sondheim's music is not easily accessible the first time through. This is reflected in the fact that his shows typically do not last very long after they open on Broadway. It takes an audience time to catch on to what he is saying, and to understand his musico-dramatic language. Sondheim understands this:

[*Road Show* on Broadway] got reviewed as usual—dismissively and condescendingly—but that's what every show I write with John Weidman gets, so it's par for the course. And not to sound too cynical about it: it will be revived in five or ten years and everybody will say it's really good.²

Sondheim had very few "hit" first-run musicals on Broadway, among which might be *Sweeney Todd* (557 performances), *A Little Night Music* (601 performances), and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (964 performances). He has had some that were slow to be professionally produced (*Saturday Night* (off-Broadway only), *The Frogs* (2004)), and a couple clear box office failures (*Anyone Can Whistle* (9 performances), *Merrily We Roll Along* (16 performances)). Yet he has a devoted following and is respected by critics and audiences alike. His music has proved to be lasting through the number of revivals produced both professionally and on amateur stages worldwide. A number of albums featuring arrangements of Sondheim's music have been recorded. His music has also been adapted in several musical reviews, including *Putting it Together*, *Side by Side by Sondheim*, and *Sondheim on Sondheim*.

¹ Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 191.

² *Ibid.*, 228.

In the 1970s, Music Publisher Tommy Valando saw the value in printing
Sondheim's music for the future:

Steve is a rarity in today's world of show music. Obviously the music publisher makes a great deal of money from hit songs and Steve does not write hit songs... Publishing his scores is an investment that will pay off later when people realize *just* how brilliant a songwriter he is.³

Michael Bennett, famed director choreographer, put it this way: "Steve...understands more about the musical theater than anyone. His music is something you have to get to know. You are not going to get show tunes like Rodgers and Hammerstein turned out."⁴ Perhaps scholars, critics and audiences have been realizing that this is true, because they are becoming more comfortable with Sondheim's style—a style that is established, recognizable, intellectual, and ultimately enjoyable.

As mentioned in the introduction, Sondheim understands that he does have an individual compositional style by saying "I've a voice, I've a voice."⁵ This voice, at least in part, comes from his ability to defy the audience's sense of musical and dramatic expectation, by using innovative means with which to express himself within the constraints of compositional techniques and processes of twentieth-century American musical theater composers.

³ Zadan, *Sondheim & Co*, 79.

⁴ Ibid., 123.

⁵ Ibid., 51.

Appendix A- Recordings and Productions Considered for Analysis

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum (1962)¹

1. Original Broadway Cast Recording, 1962
2. Broadway Revival Cast 1996 (TOFT)²

Anyone Can Whistle (1964)

1. Original Broadway Cast Recording, 1964
2. New York City Center Encores Production, 2010

Company (1970)

1. Original Broadway Cast Recording, 1970
2. DVD of the recording of the Original Broadway Cast, 1970
3. DVD Broadway Revival Cast, 2005

Follies (1971)

1. Original Broadway Cast Recording, 1971
2. Complete New Jersey Cast Recording, 1998
3. Broadway Revival Cast, 2001 (TOFT)

A Little Night Music (1973)

1. Original Broadway Cast Recording, 1973
2. Broadway Revival Cast Recording, 2010
3. Broadway Revival Production, 2010

Pacific Overtures (1976)

1. Original Broadway Cast Recording, 1976
2. Original Broadway Cast, 1976 (TOFT)
3. Broadway Revival Cast Recording, 2004

Sweeney Todd (1979)

1. Original Broadway Cast Recording, 1979 (TOFT)
2. Original Broadway Cast, 1979 (TOFT)
3. DVD Broadway National tour cast, 1982

¹ The dates given are the years in which the shows were originally produced on Broadway or Off-Broadway.

² TOFT is the Theatre on Film and Tape Archive at the New York Public Library. This archive contains original Broadway cast productions recorded for every original Sondheim production from *Pacific Overtures* (1976) to *Road Show* (2008). There are also a number of revivals (particularly Broadway revivals) and other professional productions from the United States.

Merrily We Roll Along (1981)

1. Original Broadway Cast, 1981 (TOFT)
2. Original Broadway Cast Recording, 1981
3. Broadway Revival Cast Recording, 1994

Sunday in the Park with George (1984)

1. Original Broadway Cast Recording, 1984
2. DVD, Original Broadway Cast, 1984
3. London Revival Cast Recording, 2006
4. London Revival Cast (Broadway production), 2007

Into the Woods (1987)

1. Original Broadway Cast Recording, 1987
2. DVD Original Broadway Cast, 1987

Assassins (1990 Off-Broadway)

1. Off-Broadway Cast Recording
2. Broadway Revival Cast Recording 2004
3. Broadway Revival Cast, 2004 (TOFT)

Passion (1994)

1. Original Broadway Cast Recording, 1994
2. DVD Original Broadway Cast, 1994

The Frogs (1974/2004)³

1. Broadway Revival Cast Recording, 2004
2. Broadway Revival Cast, 2004 (TOFT)

Bounce (2003)/*Road Show* (2008)⁴

1. Original Cast Recording, 2003 (Bounce)
2. Original Broadway Cast Recording, 2009 (*Road Show*)
3. Original Broadway Cast, 2008 (*Road Show* TOFT)

³ The original production of *The Frogs* was staged by the Yale Repertory Theatre in Yale University's swimming pool in 1974. It was further adapted and staged on Broadway in 2004.

⁴ The original production of *Bounce* never made it to New York. It was revised after a reading at New York's Public Theater and re-titled as *Road Show*, where it premiered Off-Broadway in 2008. There is no available printed musical score yet for *Road Show*, so although the production and recordings of this show have informed the analysis to come, there are no detailed analyses of the music.

Appendix B- List of Song Excerpts Sampled in Chapter 4

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum

“Love, I hear,” mm. 38-45

“Free,” mm. 35-50

“That Dirty Old Man,” mm. 13-19

Anyone Can Whistle

“Anyone Can Whistle,” mm. 3-10

“Everybody Says Don't,” mm. 11-18

“With So Little to be Sure of,” mm. 39-51

Company

“The Little Things You Do Together,” mm. 1-11

“Sorry-Grateful,” mm. 2-7

“The Ladies who Lunch,” mm. 2-21

Follies

“Waiting for the Girls Upstairs,” mm. 13-33

“The Road You Didn't Take,” mm. 26-34

“Too Many Mornings,” mm. 3-18

The Frogs

“Invocation & Instructions,” mm. 54-64

“Dress Big,” mm. 34-42

“Ariadne,” mm. 11-24

A Little Night Music

“Send in the Clowns,” mm. 2-7

“The Miller's Son,” mm. 28-43

“It Would Have Been Wonderful,” mm. 8-22

Pacific Overtures

“The Advantages of Floating in the Middle of the Sea,” mm. 4-22

“Someone in a Tree,” mm. 111-118

“A Bowler Hat,” mm. 4-30

Sweeney Todd

“Epiphany,” mm. 20-32

“Not While I'm Around,” mm. 3-10

“Wait,” mm. 25-31

Merrily We Roll Along

“Good Thing Going,” mm. 4-11

“Not a Day Goes By,” mm. 10-16

“Our Time,” mm. 23-32

Sunday in the Park with George

“We Do Not Belong Together,” mm. 68-79

“Putting it Together,” mm. 1a-19

“Sunday,” mm. 24-33

Into the Woods

“Giants in the Sky,” mm. 7-11

“I Know things Now,” mm. 8-18

“Moments in the Woods,” mm. 27-34

Assassins

“Opening,” mm. 5-11

“Gun Song,” mm. 92-99

“Another National Anthem,” mm. 137-141

Passion

“Happiness,” mm. 34-41

“Scene 14 (No One Has Ever Loved Me),” mm. 1-8

“Loving You,” mm. 5-20

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